## PC PLAYSTATION XEO

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ZERO ZULU | 3-349
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VOL 13 ISSUE 3 06.2010 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00







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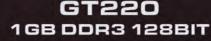




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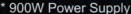
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Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

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#### INDUSTRY STUFF...

The other day I had to buy Just Cause 2 on Xbox for someone I know. Yes, despite what you might think, I do buy games for friends and family occasionally - I can't bum off the distributors for everything you know. ;) Anyway, I found myself at a large shopping centre in Cresta. I don't usually shop there but I was there on a mission to buy all that Halloween junk for the Alan Wake competition page – go and have a look LOL. On the way to the Halloween shop, I stopped at every single place I know that stocks computer and console games. I won't list them here but you can probably all guess. By the third disappointing stop I was beginning to understand some of our poor readers who complain that they can never find the games they want in the shops. I just couldn't relate to them, yet here I was in the exact same position. Just Cause 2 is a massive game with excellent ratings and a big production budget - it's even a sequel, and here, a few weeks after its official release date, I couldn't find it anywhere. All this, after going into about eight different stores in a major shopping centre in the middle of JHB. I eventually ended up at Northgate where they did have it (at a specialised gaming store). This is just a message to the distributors and retail companies in South Africa. Please don't complain to anyone (ever again) about declining game sales and the general market and the recession and blah, etc. No stock is the same as no sale.

#### BABE NUKED ...

We nuked the Babe of the Month page for something much more sinister. We could always say that due to pressure from the community we were forced to drop it... the real story is a classic tale of putting something terrible out there for a while and then switching it to something awesome which makes the awesome thing that much more awesome. See how clever we are.

#### **RAGE 2010**

We've been in a lot of meetings this past month about rAge 2010 and it looks like all the big gaming companies are going to have plenty of cool early code to show. I suspect rAge 2010 will have the most playable code of any rAge to date. We're also organising some nice extras for the NAG LAN. We even sent people to Switzerland to see how they do it at a super-sized event (think over 10,000 unique computers). Besides trying to secure quick Internet for all those online activations and servers, we're also buying some fancy new kit for the LAN – think fibre optic. It's starting to gain momentum, and I predict 1-3 October 2010 is going to blow a hole in your mouse pad.

Michael James

## Cover story Yes, it's all true. The next Call of Duty is already on its way. Megarom sent us all the way to Los Angeles to take a look for ourselves. There isn't any drama on this cover option – it's an easy choice considering the ridiculous popularity of the

last game and the whole series for that matter. Just for the record, we demanded, begged and eventually threatened and pleaded for some information on the zombie mode – but we got nothing, which oddly is still something if you read between the lines.

The only quirk is that this event was the single player event, and soon we'll be invited to the multiplayer event for more coverage. This isn't the first time this game mode press coverage splitting tactic has been used. Just for the record, I don't approve of it and don't like the way these publishers are trying to get two major articles in the media for a single game across one or three issues. It's cheap and it's not fooling anyone. Enjoy the issue – it's much better than it looks.;)

#### NAG



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zombie stunt doubles

geoff burrows dane remendes

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international correspondent miktar dracon

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#### Letter of the Moment

From: Adolph Subject: Too white?

'VE BEEN AN AVID collector of games and a gamer for nearly 25 years now, and a long-time reader of NAG (since your fine magazine first launched in fact). Now that we've established my humble credentials (which seem to be customary in the letter's section) let's get into the meat of this letter.

I generally enjoy columns and opinion pieces, which is one of the reasons I'm writing to you. Don't worry I'm not going to ask to be a columnist, nor will I complain about your columnists. I can appreciate the difficult task it is to write a relevant opinion piece for a magazine and to keep on producing quality work at regular intervals.

The issue of race is one I rarely gave any thought to (I have to admit), but it sparked my interest when one of my black friends recently finished the first Uncharted (on PS3). Although, he absolutely loved the game (and subsequently borrowed my copy of Uncharted 2), he couldn't help but notice that the cannon fodder was all black (obviously given the setting of the game). It sparked an interesting discussion (although hilarious in places) on how he felt about games and how he saw the gaming industry, for instance, the lack of black protagonists, and how the most notable one was CJ from GTA San Andreas, who incidentally conformed to a stereotype, or how Cole Train from

Gears of War fulfilled the "athletic, loud but not too bright" stereotype. We did agree that games allowing for character customization had it right (Mass Effect 2), and that too much credence given to the race of characters was counterproductive. I suppose it's a complicated matter, and one that can either run amok because of too much sensitivity to the race issue. or (on the other side of the scale) utter ignorance or apathy.

In any case, our interesting discourse really made me think; wouldn't it be fascinating for NAG to employ a black, coloured or Indian columnist to give a different perspective to gaming in South Africa? I know we're all gamers, but come-on let's admit it; the gaming industry has a long way to go."

This is an interesting topic and we did have a letter a while ago about black characters in games and 'colour' in general in video games. Like most media, in the early days of gaming not a single character was black,

Indian or otherwise (unless it was an alien of course - or a zombie). However, most new games do allow you to play black characters in the multiplayer mode. It's a perspective problem I suppose – if you're white you just don't notice it. Recent games like Resident Evil 5 and Far Crv 2 caused some media buzz about black cannon fodder so the topic is out there and people are aware of it. In terms of NAG, we do have a black writer, occupying the most technical position on the writing team in fact – he also covers all fighting and some racing games. The problem for us is that whenever we put out the call for writers in the magazine we get mostly white people sending in their writing examples. End of the day this is reflective of the general gaming community in South Africa - the good news is that the community is slowly changing. Regardless, we'll always hire the best writers

based on their writing skill and not their colour. Ed.

No Artwork Supplied

**No Artwork** Supplied



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION! Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158 Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win..

From: Fabian

Subject: Nuking things for morbid just seems... cooler.

OLY POLYPEPTIDE! AFTER READING this month's Ed Note (about 2 minutes ago), I quickly jumped online to validate what I figured just HAD to be some sort of inside joke. Alas, they really DO say "Nuke the entire site from orbit"... I was with the Ed on this one up until this very moment.

In light of the above (proof that Michael wasn't alone in his supposedly 'idiotic' rendition of this infamous movie quote), I went in search of other commonly misquoted movie lines.

Ironically, I had difficulty finding any other examples of quotes that sound like one thing but are actually another. I just found an influx of misquotes based purely on a lack of actual knowledge of the real line. This includes the likes of "Luke, I am your father", "Do you feel lucky, punk" and "Beam me up, Scotty", none of which were ever actually said at any point in any movie.

However, on doing a search for "Nuke the entire site for morbid" and "Nuke the site for morbid", I found over 4000 results of other people misquoting the movie in exactly the same way. So, I (and hopefully Michael as well) can go to sleep tonight, safe in the knowledge that there are at the very least 4000 other people who are equally as stupid as us. It's actually a little sad, to be honest. Aliens has always been one of my favourite movies and "Nuke the entire site for morbid" has always

been one of the most memorable quotes. The fact that it was said in such an unusual way, using a word in a context I never expected made the statement almost, well, poetic. Now it's just another run-of-the-mill blurb.

Damn you Michael. Damn you and your ridiculous meme. You could have simply avoided "giving yourself away". Now you've completely destroyed a lifelong memory and I'm left wondering just how many other things I've been completely wrong about."

I'm all in agreement that 'for morbid' does sound better – it's more eclectic and in some way more dismissive and remote than orbit. I'm calling Cameron for a second opinion on this one, Ed.

From: Richard

Subject: A relationship between the human subconscious and Gaming

**■■ ■ MAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES THAT** would be if we could tap the un-tapped power of our minds, or more to my point the human subconscious. Now what would this mean for us gamers? I for one think it would prove to be a means for which a probably endless amount of new and creative ideas for games and gaming mechanics could spew forth. After the horrible mess that would be the most likely result delivered had been shifted through and cleaned up one could end up with an altogether new and innovative story for a game (or complete nonsensical garbage

#### Shorts [extracts of LOL from NAG reader letters1

There was only, like, 2% wrong with Mass Effect 2, Okay. Seriously. There will be no shame.

– Tarryn van der Byl

Hello, I would like to start by saying bloody ESKOM.

-M@

I must confess that for the past 3 years I have been purchasing your magazine intermittently, but have since given myself 50 lashes for every issue missed, and have now been purchasing it monthly for the past 6 months and L haven't looked back since. - Rowan

#### Freedom!

Welcome comrades, this is a freedom magazine in the free country of South Africa. Therefore the following topics are banned from the letters page until we decide differently. We're tired of these oppressive and tiresome topics:

- Violence in children and gaming (including violins and children in gaming)
- This platform is better than that platform
- Gamers used to be nerds but now everyone is a gamer and it's cool to be a nerd gamer because everyone is a nerd or something.

#### NAG LETTERS JUNE 2010

We have a rare treat this month in the letters page. There is intelligence, wit, entertainment, kindness and epic sheerness (just go with it) of amazing awesome. That's right people of NAG land. I shall be writing both these pages myself. I, the great Ed shall... Oops, hang on that is for somewhere else.

Must be some mix up in the acquisitions department.

However, some of this is true – some letters this month managed to make sense and are actually worth printing here for a change.

depending on the person being probed).

How many times have you found yourself bleary eyed and just starting to gain full awareness as you wake up, when the memories of last night's dream come racing back to you in a flood of raw and powerful emotions, and you find yourself desperately trying to cling to the memory of that dream that captured and made you hold on to the edge of your seat (or is that bed) as you prayed that you would not wake up before the ending to your story.

Now what if we could not only record these dreams but actually partake in them as well. This has been the idea behind many a sci-fi film, however never has it been viewed in a gaming context. Take one dream recording machine, select the "game" most suited to your taste and put on your headset. It sure would be a step up from current gaming peripherals (ask yourself, do you want to be professor Xavier with your mind diving helmet of fun, or Jar Jar Binks with a Wii remote?) Or why not upload your own favourite subconscious thoughts, for others to enjoy and experience.

This may all sound like something out of a cartoon or "Psychonauts", and for the most part it is, however steps are being made in the right direction and it may not be too far off, and who knows, no one saw the Wii coming did they? For now though it shall have to remain a dream.

There are some people that claim to be able to 'influence' or 'direct' the nature and outcome of their dreams. Apparently anyone can do it - all it takes is practice. Dreaming is a fascinating part of being a human and some studies say that dreaming is critical for mental health. I wonder if messing with this whole process by sticking a joystick into it is such a good idea after all. Ed.

From: Nicolas

Subject: Do you want some Destruction with that?

**HE LATEST PHASE OF** gaming involves destroying everything that the eye can





#### NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Oh, and now a prize, too! You'll win a copy of Pinnacle Studio 14 HD Ultimate, courtesy of Phoenix Software





Altamish Mahomed: "The attached image was put together by using the level images found in the World of Goo directory. Thought I would hint at who the real sign painter really is... umm... NAG writers..." [Nice one dude, very creative and for one of the best independent games ever. You can get World of Goo on Steam BTW. Ed1

see. But is that a good thing? Are we ready for all this? Is the gaming clan ready to evolve and manage a new era of nowhere to hide? I doubt there are still too many noobs that can't wrap their head around it. That can't grow up into proper gamers. Until we can accept that a frag is a frag and the world will keep turning. Until then we should keep with the old. The new isn't ready for us.

I've told you people a million times before don't send me letters when you're stoned or drunk. Ed.

From: losh Subject: The BioShock series

**EY NAG. MY MOST** anticipated game of all time was BioShock 2 – I even pre-ordered it despite the fact that I'm not a huge gamer. That's how excited I was for it! BioShock 1 was amazing from the story to the atmosphere, everything was spot on. I started playing BioShock 1 and was immediately hooked, it was an amazing game and left me wanting more which is why when I heard of BioShock 2's release I was ecstatic. When I eventually got my hands on BioShock 2 and started it up I immediately noticed how the graphics had been downgraded - a bit unusual for a sequel. The game didn't really pull me in until the last 5 or so levels which would even rival the first game. The ending was emotional and far better than its predecessor but overall though a slightly disappointing sequel. Looking ahead, although I am happy more BioShock's will be released, I'm not

sure it's the right thing to do. I would hate to see one of the most legendary games of all time ruined by dumb ideas and repetitive gameplay. Let's see though. Thanks!

This whole sequel thing is complicated. The blame should be handed out 50/50 between the gamers and the developers. On the gamer side when something magical arrives that nobody was expecting, the original Tomb Raider, BioShock, Half-Life, etc. everyone is amazed, loves it and can't stop playing it. It's a big, fat, pleasant surprise with no preconceived notions or expectations. Now for the sequel there are expectations, a waiting period, nostalgia of a particular time in your life, etc. How can anything hope to match up to all that? It's impossible. The other side are developers and publishers who keep pumping out sequels until the water turns grev (the Tomb Raider series for example). To fix it all up gamers must lower their unrealistic expectations and developers must only make sequels for the love of the game and not the money. Ed.

From: lames

Subject: Mass Effect 2

EAR NAG. I KNOW I must annoy the hell out of the person who will receive this with my pointless emails, but I need your help with something. One of my friends refuses to play Mass Effect 2 with his only reason that its "generic". Despite me constantly telling him how epic it is, he refuses to play it. What should I do? Should I stop trying to convince him and leave him to an empty Mass Effect-free life, commit him to an asylum or simply choke his incompetent life out of him? Please advise and thanks for the badass magazine."

I always go for the choking and stabbing and crushing, but then a long prison term means you miss Mass Effect 3. Ed.

From: Jaco Subject: Reviews

OW ABOUT ADDING INTERNET usage (Speed required and bytes usage) to your reviews for the uninformed PC gamers? I hated Steam games due to internet activation, Dragon Age & Borderlands you pop in game, activate via internet, install and play. Alien vs. Predator and Metro 2033 Steam activation is required, nightmare, taking hours, until of course I borrowed a friend's 3G modem, inserted my... [Goes on to list many different statistics, Ed] ...new DRM from Ubisoft, i.e. permanent high speed internet connection required to play. Thus will I be using 1MB per hour or 100MB per hour? Now please do not think that this is a darkest Africa problem, look at the reviews of Splinter Cell and AC2, with some reviews indicating that they cannot recommend you buy this game with the current DRM. Not to mention some gamers now saying yes to piracy. Not me, too scared someone SMS's my details to crime line, and as I understand from my brother, there is no internet connection in the cells in prison, but the canteen does sell NAG."

This is a good idea – we have added online requirements to our review box but it would be helpful to indicate how much bandwidth the game uses per hour I suppose. We'll make a note and chat about it at some point. Ed.

#### On the Forums

QUESTION: So, E3 2010. Electronic Entertainment Expo. Do you care? Why do you care?

OllieTheDog: Heck Yeah! E3 is going to bring new gaming possibilities.

M2K: Hell yes! Its going to be legendary can't wait to see what new games n stuff will be unveiled.

Demikid: Yes because that's where we get an idea of what great plans the developers have for us.

Graal: I care, because I want to see what Blizzard is up to with

**Splash:** Oh hell yes. Why? Well it gives us a bit of a look into what the developers have install for us in the coming months. I'm probably most excited to learn what developers are doing with DirectX 11 in up and coming games.

**Dead!Raven:** The last two years have produced nothing that interesting. Usually it's set too early in the year to show off all the games that are getting released around Q4 (the ones people are actually excited about) so no, I really don't care. Although, it may surprise us. Guess we'll have to wait and see.

echo: Sure, it's the biggest time in the gaming calendar and any gamer should care. Most looking forward to Gears 3, Deus Ex 3 and Episode 3.

**Sir PaniCore:** Of course, so I can start salivating over all the gaming goodies that I probably won't be able to afford.

MaTth1as: It's the Woodstock of gaming! Why wouldn't you care? Maybe Woodstock was a bad metaphor:

**Xcaliber:** Not really. It's easy to show off your game in a limited environment. Good E3 does not equal good game.

vii: I try to avoid E3 news at all costs. I prefer to not be caught up in hype, then when a good game comes out I can judge it on its own merits and not be disappointed by inflated expectations. For example: I never heard of Fable (the first one) before its release. I played it without knowing all the things Molyneux promised us and because of that it still sits in my top 5 games of all time. No Hype = No appointments.

nukehead: mE3h, unless you are actually attending the expo, what is the point? Getting all hyped about ideas? Until the actual product is before me I prefer to keep a blank slate on the expectations front. If, however, I had the opportunity to go there I think I might do a 180 and become a slobbering fool.

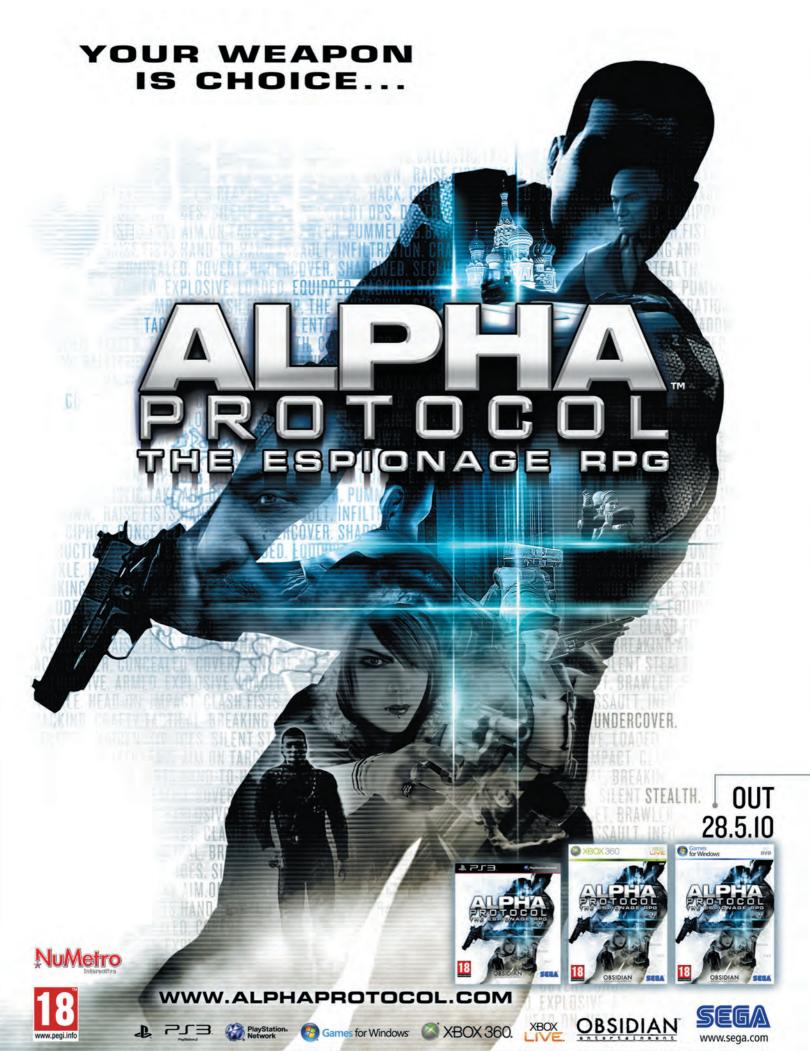
NecroWolf: I'm quite interested to see what Sony has up their sleeves. I'm hoping to see Resistance 3, MotorStorm 3, Killzone 3, Uncharted 3, Infamous 3, I mean 2 and something new and awesome. I also want to see if Sony can justify forking out cash to buy Move. A Kevin Butler cameo would be awesome as well. Also, a new SSX would have me jumping for joy.

MrDeVil\_909: Not something I normally get steamed up about, but I'm interested to hear details about the new XCOM shooter and The Witcher 2.

**Incognito:** I sure do care. My fingers are crossed to see more about id's Rage, the possible unveiling of Half-Life 2 Episode 3 and any new info on Diablo 3 will get my nerd rage on!

pArkEr: Well the presentations aren't half bad. I mean, Microsoft had Paul McCartney last year, how is that not awesome? He didn't do much but his very presence was more than enough. I always expect some big announcements as well. This year specifically, I'm looking forward to seeing Gears 3, some Natal games, The Last Guardian, InFamous 2, Resistance 3 and possibly Agent. Oh, and booth babes.

Come share your insights and opinions over on our forums (now with new hosting!): http://www.nag.co.za/forums/



I, Gamer

by Miklós Szecsei

#### The end is nigh!

RECENTLY MORE BILLS HAVE been thrown in and out of courts than there are bills on a Hydra-Duck that's gone twelve rounds against Ash J. Williams. One of the cornerstones of gaming is unmitigated, wanton violence - hooray! In 2005 an affront to this awesomeness happened when that shrivelled meat sack, Arnold Schwarzenegger, flexed his flaccid, governor biceps and picked a fight against violent games.

To date, California is still trying to enforce strict fines against retailers selling violent games to kids. How are they doing this when their state court already told Arnold to un-bunch his panties? By taking the matter to the U.S. Supreme Court, that's how. Of course, Arnold and Co. ran the risk of the Supreme Court also telling them to dislodge their girly-wedgies. The problem is, it didn't and now the matter is headed for the highest judicial authority in the USA - you know, in that country where the majority of our games are made.

We'll have to endure Playmobil approved versions of Left 4 Dead without gory zombies, blood and dismemberment!

So let's assume the worst (because there's nothing like a healthy dose of mass hysteria) and imagine that the Supreme Court gives the bill the thumbs-up, what happens then? Well, game developers might water down violence in games, and that's one of the cornerstones gone! We'll be left with a lop-sided industry leaning heavily towards censorship! Games will become more like they are in Australia! We'll have to endure Playmobil approved versions of Left 4 Dead without gory zombies, blood and dismemberment!

Hysteria aside, why should we care about this? For starters, North America is the largest producer and market for games in the world. If their Supreme Court rules for the regulation of sales of violent games to minors, then developers might change their approach to making game content; a sort of self-censorship will likely result. The types of games we play, the way games are advertised and the way they are sold will be altered. And overseas developers will follow suit: why manufacture a violent game only to have it heavily regulated by the largest market in the world?

It's that whole "freedom of artistic expression" thing, except this time it actually looks as if it could be in a real spot of bother.



## Bungie takes the leap, and look where they landed

**DESPITE ALL OF ACTIVISION'S** bad press in recent months over their debacle with Infinity Ward, the publisher has gone and done something almost unbelievable: they've signed up *Halo* developers Bungie Studios on a ten-year exclusive contract. The studio, which broke away from Microsoft in 2007 despite its continued exclusive support for the Xbox 360, seems to be confident with the decision, and is looking forward to expanding out of its Halo pigeonhole.

The deal has been in the pipeline for almost a year, and in Bungie's mind for longer than that. "This came from way back in 2007, when Bungie became an independent company again," design director Joseph Staten told Destructoid in a recent interview. "In 2007 we started to look at the future and really chart out what we wanted to do.

Since their split from Microsoft, the company has been on the lookout for a solid publishing partner that would give them creative freedom, which is surprisingly where Activision came in. "As we looked at different partners," Staten explains, "lots of different people had different deals. They were all really interesting deals, but you know, Activision had an amazing deal. And it was amazing not just because it funded us for the next ten years creatively, but because they understood what mattered to us.

According to Staten, Bungie is still in complete control of their IP, and will be able to develop future properties on their own terms - almost exactly what Infinity Ward was promised.

Of course, the reason why any should care about this deal is simple: multi-platform releases. Bungie knows that Activision likes to see its games released on everything from the DS to the PS2, and this is something that appeals to the studio. "We're not just telling it to one particular audience," Staten continues, "we're actually telling it to as many that want to listen and engage in the experience. So Activision absolutely brings that to the table, and that's incredibly exciting from a creative point of view.

No matter how you spin it, this announcement seems to come at a great time for Activision in terms of recovering a bit of favour from the community. The publisher is far from popular at the moment, and you can bet that they'll do their best to treat Bungie with care and love, at least for the time being







## The neverending drama

The Activision vs. Infinity Ward debacle continues. Bobby Kotick, the CEO of the publisher, recently spoke to investigators about the matter. He told them that the decision to let studio heads Jason West and Vince Zampella go was a difficult one, but that it was necessary. He also said that the decision had nothing to do with their bonuses.

"Once you begin to understand what has occurred, there was no grey area," he said. "There was no way to retain their services, as talented as they might have been."

"I personally consider both of them friends, and their conduct was a betrayal of that friendship," he added. He went further to say that he was upset about the further 35 employees that left Infinity Ward during the fallout, and added that he believed more were likely to go.

However, he was still upbeat about the future of the studio, saying that Activision had "aggressively addressed" the issue.

"Activision aggressively addressed the recent Infinity Ward issue and clearly remains focused on insuring the health of its most important non-Blizzard franchise," Kotick said.

"We continue to believe that the company will be able to navigate through any difficulties caused by Infinity Ward personnel departures."



# CREATE YOUR BLACK STYLE

Leading PC chassis, cooler and power manufacturer Cooler Master had created a series of black line up. Such as Elite 310 black, GX series power supply and V6 GT CPU cooler. The Elite 310 black is a mid-tower case, built with modern black on both interior and exterior and multi-color frame on the front panel. Cooler Master is fulfilling upper mid-range users by releases the GX series. It supports SLI or CrossFireX as well as boosting the system to the maximum performance. Last but not least, Cooler Master will show off its latest cooling innovation the V6 GT. Featuring highly dense aluminum fins and a Double-V heatpipe design, offering awesome cooling for even the most high-end desktop systems.







Black Edition Integrate Recommend Elite 310 Black Edition + GX Series + V6 GT



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nnesburg Cape Town 314 5800 Tel: 021 551 8218 252 5974 Fax: 021 551 8244 The Indie Investigator

by Rodain Joubert

## Keeping point and click alive

HE ADVENTURE-GAME GENRE HAS been through its ups and downs. Older gamers will remember the halcyon days of text-based escapades and early VGA graphics at a time when Sierra was still trying to append the word "Quest" to every dog and its grandmother. Then there was the admittedly difficult FMV period which saw the release of some absolutely stunning titles amidst a deluge of unadulterated crap. And if today's Mass Effect fans weep bitterly about a single CD swap during their 40+ hour gaming session, a Riven island-hopping session could probably provide some valuable perspective.

Since then, people have perceived a yawning void in the adventure game market because the deluge of point and click titles hasn't caused them to stumble over one of these buggers every three seconds. Of course, the supposed "death" of adventure games is absolute poppycock. Its flag is still

#### Of course, the supposed "death" of adventure games is absolute poppycock.

being carried in the mainstream with episodic games like Sam & Max, while independent game developers all over the world are still cranking out titles using such time-honoured traditions as verb coins and grue-eatery. And man, that produces a lot of games.

That's not to say that quantity necessarily equals quality, but there certainly are some great indie adventures out there. Games like IGF award winner Machinarium have received a great deal of attention due to their innovative styles and superb presentation. Other titles such as the Ben and Dan series from Zombie Cow Studios are praised for their wit and raw fun value. Even Zero Punctuation's Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw regularly enjoys making his own stuff in a tool called Adventure Game Studio, a program which allows anyone to start crafting adventure titles in the timehonoured tradition of various Sierra and LucasArts franchises.

Adventure games certainly aren't dead - they've just gone a little further underground. If you aren't opposed to a bit of indie experimentation, have a look around for top-rated titles today: some of them stick to classic formulae, while others strive to be more experimental and appeal to a newer market. If you've never been an adventure fan, then so be it. But if you've ever found yourself longing for the days of Daventry royalty and insult sword fighting, do yourself a favour and look for these hidden gems.



# Dead Rising 2 is getting silly

## Some interesting new details emerge from Capcom's upcoming zombie title

**EAD RISING 2 IS** getting so close we can almost smell the rotting flesh. In a recent presentation, Capcom's Keiji Inafune revealed some fantastic new information on the game, with particular focus on the game's dark humour.

There are loads of zombie games, western gamers love zombies," he said. "There are loads of shooters, loads of sandbox games, but there is only one that does comedy and action and zombies all in one. It really is truly unique.

Much like in the first title, players are encouraged to use nonconventional weapons to take care of the undead menace. Playing cards, dishes, broomsticks and sporting goods are all great for getting the job done, but Dead Rising 2's new system allows players to combine a number of items to form new, more powerful weapons. Machetes can be combined with a toy helicopter to deliver a whirling implement of decapitation;

gardening shears can be taped onto a pair of boxing gloves for a hell of a good punchup, and, as you've possibly seen before, chainsaws can be attached to a number of things, such as rowing oars and even motorbikes, to add a little dicing power to your daily commute.

Sure, that's dark and wonderful, but Capcom's use of alcohol in the game really pushes it into the category of "oh yes please." When the player takes a little too much of the hooch or eats rotten food out of trashcans, there's a chance that they'll regurgitate the offending food or drink all over the place. Gross, yes, but wait for the punch line: Any zombies nearby will slip on the vomit, making them easier to kill or provide a hilarious distraction while you (or your co-op partner) make a getaway. We're dying to see the applications of this mechanic, and this is only the beginning of the kind of crazy stuff we can expect to see from Dead Rising 2.

## LEFT 4 DEAD 2 MUTATES

Valve has recently added an interesting new feature to Left 4 Dead 2: mutations. These game-changing conditions are sent out by Valve every week, and are a new optional gameplay type for players to dabble in. This way, Valve can experiment with new gameplay types without the need for additional assets, and players can opt to be the guinea pigs. Valve then polls players to get feedback for each game mutation. Ön launch week, the company released Bleed Out. a mutation that gave players no permanent health or health kits. Only pain pills and adrenaline, which forced them to keep moving at all times or risk bleeding to death even if they hadn't been hurt.

### SEGA tries something different with DRM

DRM solutions are always cause for concern for legitimate PC gamers. Publishers have tried everything from limited installations to stringent online-only policies, to abandoning the idea altogether, but SEGA is trying something a little different with Alpha Protocol. The third-party solution, Uniloc: Softanchor will only allow five simultaneous installations of the game as well as a once-off online activation, but users can choose to transfer an

activation file to a PC with an Internet connection should the gaming PC not have one, run the application, and return the updated file to the installed game and continue from there. On top of that, the publisher has promised that they "will provide a version of the game without license management (available as a patch) in around 18-24 months after release," although they weren't able to give specific



## Alan Wake gets live

**F YOU'VE HAD A** chance to play *Alan Wake*, you've no-doubt noticed the live-action TV sequences in the game; that's only the beginning of this cross-media take on the spooky action/horror title. The game is going to receive a live-action TV series comprising of six episodes that initially aired exclusively on nytimes.com, and are now also available on Xbox LIVE and brightfalls.com. The first three episodes are currently available for viewing.

The show acts as a prequel to the game, and follows a reporter named Jake as he explores the creepy town of Bright Falls (in which the game is set) and interviews key people from the game, including Dr. Hartman, the psychologist who runs the local lodge for creative loonies.

"We were really trying to set up the world of the game before the game's characters are born into it," the series director, Phillip Van, said in an interview with New York Times. "We wanted to build original content and an original story that really said something about the town as a character itself. It's almost about the town happening to him, and we really wanted to walk the line between the psychological and the supernatural."

According to crew working on the show, it's almost eerie how much the buildings and surroundings of their set locations in rural Washington and Oregon are like those of *Alan Wake*, as well as Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, which shares more than a couple of familiar themes with the game and TV show.



### Mechwarrior 4 is free as a bird

With all of the legal wrangling between Microsoft and MekTek finally out of the way, Mektek has announced the free release of *Mechwarrior 4*, which is no-doubt an attempt to increase awareness of the brand as the release of the next game in the series (which is being developed by Piranha Games) draws nearer. There's just one snag: MekTek wants users to download the game using their proprietary download manager, which, when combined with a heavily overloaded server due to high demand, is incredibly slow; it's also buggy and not all that much to look at. The reason behind this is supposedly so that MekTek can continue to offer updates and patches for the game. If you've got the patience, we strongly recommend that you give it a bash. If we manage to get clearance to distribute the game on the cover disc, we'll certainly do so, but until then it's up to you.

#### >>> MMO GAMING ON THE GO

Vodacom is

busting into the mobile gaming scene with Legends of Echo. This MMO is location-based, which means that player characters are located in the same physical area as the players themselves. Characters can explore their surroundings in a virtual recreation of South Africa, but instead of skyscrapers and suburbs, characters will be greeted with rolling fields, rocky outcrops and valleys to explore. The object of the game is to achieve the highest score, which results in prizes being drawn on a regular basis. To accomplish this, players find and equip weapons and other items, and travel (virtually or physically) across the country to explore areas, and trade with or even battle other players. The game is free to play, but there are optional purchases that can be performed in exchange for airtime. Otherwise. the only cost is your data charge. Head over to www. legendsofecho. mobi from your mobile phone and start playing.



Miktar's Meanderings



by Miktar Dracon

#### Know Your Game Providers: America for Dummies

NSIDE EUROPE'S GEOGRAPHICAL NSIDE EURUPE S GEOGRAPHICAL BORDERS, lay a vast cacophony of unique countries that - while belonging to the same union - are each their own nation with their own heritage of quirks. Not to mention, each one has a different funny accent and eats very different food.

America is very much like Europe. Inside America's geographical borders, much the same thing is taking place as in Europe just with different names assigned to them, slightly more cooperation between each "country", and a touch of homogeny across them

An "American New Yorker" is as distinct from an "American Californian", as a "German" is from a "Frenchman".

mostly due to cultural synchronisation in spite of the sheer size of America's landmass. Translation: Americans are equal parts "American", and whatever state they were born in. An "American New Yorker" is as distinct from an "American Californian", as a "German" is from a "Frenchman".

You could say the American Civil War did homogenise the lot of them quite a bit, mostly into opposing cultures with clashing views on slavery. But after the Civil War, even if there is lingering resentment from the side that lost, America once again settled back into its individual micro-cultures.

South Africa has micro-cultures in its provinces with their municipalities, with each their own "branches" for the various governmental subdivisions of the nation's landmass. With America, that subdividing is just far more numerous and goes down deeper, due to the four-time-zone size of the nation's landmass.

There are state governments, which sets up governmental structures on the local, county and town/village level. Like Russian nesting dolls, they sit inside federal jurisdiction. And that's a gross oversimplification. How many discreet offices of government are there in the US? To quote Wikipedia, "there are 89,500 local governments, including 3,033 counties, 19,492 municipalities, 16,500 townships, 13,000 school districts, and 37,000 other special districts that deal with issues like fire protection."

All this, to manage the 51 nation-esq states (okay 50 states and one federal district) inside the United States (name makes sense now, don't it), making it a federal constitutional republic.

Most of America is farmland



# Blizzard lays down the challenge

As STARCRAFT If'S RELEASE date looms (27 July 2010), more details are crawling out of the woodwork, including some rather interesting information on the single player aspect of the game. If any of you have had a chance to put your strategic abilities to the test in the online multiplayer beta, you'll know that the level of competition is tough. One of the biggest challenges facing players who jump from the single to the multiplayer components of an RTS will be familiar with the feeling of defeat, with the only real way of picking up their game being hours of watching pro-level replays, testing advanced strategies and practice. However, this concept is tough for newcomers, which is something that Blizzard hopes to address with the StarCraft II Challenge Mode

Challenge Mode, which players will be expected to play only once they've finished the single player campaign, is a "bridging

course" between that and the world of online gaming. Players will be tasked with completing a number of challenges similar to what they'd encounter in an online game, as well as practice sessions that aim to improve their micro skills by increasing their actions-per-minute. Examples of challenges include defeating waves of incoming enemies using a limited force of High Templars and Sentries, with an emphasis on spellcasting to tip the balance of battles, as well as using five separate sets of units in remote locations to take on five other sets of enemies, to help train micro abilities and multitasking. Each challenge will have a bronze, silver and gold achievement for completion. Other challenges will look at rush defence, multitasking, macromanagement and micromanagement, without the need to take a beating online.

## BLIZZARD HAS UPDATED ITS STATUS

If one of your biggest problems in life is keeping your virtual social world and virtual gaming world in one neat basket. then Blizzard has the answer for you: Facebook integration in Battle.net. You'll be able to add Facebook friends to your B.net account so you can finally Zerg rush that one guy who's been irritating you since primary school, yet somehow made it onto your friends list. Few other details have been confirmed at this time, but we assume the system will allow for auto-updates on Facebook, telling the world your achievements and battle records so your family can finally comprehend just how much time you spend playing games. The new functionality will apply to all of Battle.net, but will only launch with the release of StarCraft II.

#### Xbox 360 USB drives priced and... They cost HOW much?!

Yeah, the headline pretty much sums this up. Last month NAG reported that a recent update to the Xbox 360 firmware now allows users to utilise USB drives for storing data. The data isn't limited at all so you could store downloads, saved games, profiles, you name it. When this was first made public, Microsoft mentioned that the firmware update would be followed by official, Xbox-branded USB drives with pricing details to come. Well, the pricing has come and to be honest we're not sure what Microsoft is trying to do here. An 8GB Xbox USB drive will cost \$35 (around R260) and a 16GB will set you back \$70 (or just over R500). Note, however, that these Rand values are estimates

and no official, local pricing or availability has been released.

Now, considering that you can use ANY brand of USB drive in your Xbox so long as it is more than 1GB and less than 16GB in capacity, this pricing isn't very competitive. All you are essentially doing is buying an Xbox 360 branded Sandisk USB drive. There must be some sort of reason based

on intricate business models, market analysis and economic theories, but we couldn't really be bothered to think about it any further.





## RDR gets free DLC

The game hasn't even hit the shelves, and already Rockstar is touting the upcoming (and free) DLC for *Red Dead Redemption*. Entitled *Outlaws to the End Co-op Mission Pack*, the DLC will be available for both Xbox 360 and PS3 (bucking Rockstar's recent trend with *GTA*) and will add six co-op missions for 2-4players. You can expect XP rewards, new achievements and plenty of bad guys to gun down, and you won't pay a penny for it. Future DLC for *RDR*, however, will cost you money.

If we were to speculate, this is most likely part of a concept that's slowly pushing down second-hand sales. Only retail purchasers will be entitled to receive this DLC for free, likely due to a download code being included in the game box. When the code is redeemed, it gets locked to the buyer's XBL/PSN account and cannot be transferred. Many see this tactic as a method of including regular content that was developed during the standard development cycle, and simply including it in the bundle as an added incentive for customers to buy retail rather than wait for it to hit the trade-ins bin.



### Kratos will smash your PSP

With the long-awaited *God of War III* finally in every PS3 on the planet, SCE thought this would be the perfect time to launch a continuation of the PSP-based spinoff. Entitled *God of War: Ghost of Sparta*, this title will see players once again take on the role of Kratos in his seemingly never-ending quest for vengeance and destruction. *Ghost of Sparta* will continue from the first game, and will tell the story of Kratos' ascension to power as God of War. Kratos will embark on a journey that will reveal the origins of lost worlds, and answer questions about his tattoos, scar and family.

According to the developers, significant technological strides have been made to give players a visual experience unrivalled on the platform, as well as 25% more gameplay (whatever that means). The game will feature a new weapon system, as well as new magical powers, weapons, enemies and navigational abilities. Expect everything you saw in *Chains of Olympus* plus more; this is going to be huge.

#### **>>**

#### ARRR!

If you haven't had the chance to

play the excellent (albeit somewhat repetitive) Sid Meier's Pirates!, and happen to own a Wii, listen up, landlubbers: 2K Games has officially announced the upcoming release of Pirates! for the Wii. The game's quirky nature, light-hearted attitude and ton of mini-games make it a perfect contender for the remoteflailing platform, and we're sure that it will enjoy the success that it deserves, but never managed to capture its first time round. The port will be handled by 2K China. For those of you not familiar with the game, players will take to the high seas on a quest to rescue their family from the evil Marguis de la Montalban through a series of cunning adventures and open-seas combat. This version will feature two Wii-exclusive mini-games, Bombardment and Lock Picking, to accompany the original Sword Fighting, Ship Combat, Dancing (no, that's not a typo) and others. In addition, this version will offer character and ship customisation options.



#### Notebook Stand & Cooling Pad

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the total cooling solution. ErgoStand can be used as a notebook stand and/or cooling pad. The adjustable anti-skid holders are compatible for 9"~17" laptops. The 140mm silent fan and full range mesh surface with aerodynamic designed intake provide silent and efficient cooling. Furthermore, ErgoStand includes great functions to ease your working environment such as the cable management handles, rear cable clips and 4 port USB hub.







Johannesburg Tel: 011 314 5800 Cape Town Tel: 021 551 8218 The Evolution of... Chris Taylor games



1997 - Total Annihilation



1999 - Total Annihilation: Kingdoms



2002 - Dungeon Siege



2007 - Supreme Commander



2008 - Space Siege



2010 - Supreme Commander 2



# APB gets detailed

LL POINTS BULLETIN, OR APB if you're ALL POINTS BULLETING, O.C., and any young and hip, is an action MMO from Realtime Worlds and EA, due out on July 1st. But you knew that already, we're sure, so here's some info you possibly weren't aware of: the game's unique billing system. Where most MMOs charge around \$15 a month for subscriptions, APB is going to have two options of payment: hourly or monthly. The first option allows you to purchase chunks of 20 hours' playtime for \$6.99 (about R50), but that playtime is only used when you leave the gameworld's social hubs to engage in combat and missions. While you're in town, you're essentially playing for free. If, however, you feel that you're not getting quite as much done in 20 hours as you'd wish, there is still the option to pay a fixed monthly fee for unlimited access, and that only costs \$10 a month. Additionally, there will be discounts for three- and six-month subscriptions, which make for a rather affordable MMO. The retail box will cost \$50 (R370) and will include 50 hours of playtime to get you started, which we estimate could work out to about two months of moderately casual play.

This concept isn't new globally, as some MMOs in the Far East are already employing it as a means to curb (or profit from) the excessive hours some online gamers spend in their favourite virtual world. Either way, it's a fantastic way to lure in the casual gamer. On top of all of that, there will be methods for players to actually earn playtime in-game, which is much the same as what EVE Online offers.

WHO YOU

GONNA CALL? THQ is teaming up with the horriblynamed Syfy channel to bring a number of crossmedia makeovers. The duo is looking at getting puzzleplatformer de . *Blob* turned into a cartoon, as well as a film adaption of Red Faction. but that's not all. In a recent presentation, THQ confirmed that they're working with Syfy to develop a game based on Ghost Hunters Academy, for release on the iPhone, iPad and DS. Few details are available at this stage, but we know that the iPhone version will use the device's camera for an "augmented

#### INCOMING!

reality feature,"

much like what

we've seen in

the DSi game

Ghostwire.

Some of the biggest titles for the year have finally received solid release dates, the most notable of which is StarCraft II, which has been pegged for July 27. Preparing for an October release is EA's new Medal of Honor title, which will take players into a modern combat setting in the Middle East. And on October 26, we can also expect the next Force Unleashed.



## Three new MMOs on their way

US-based publisher Trion Worlds has recently revealed their plans to release three new games. The first is *Rift: Planes of Telara*, which is a fantasy MMORPG set in a dynamic world being torn apart by powerful rifts. The game's development is reportedly being led by Might & Magic Creator Jon Van Caneghem.

Next up is their interesting MMORTS being developed by Petroglyph, which is largely made up from former developers from the original Command & Conquer. Entitled End of Nations, the game will allow players to engage, either solo or grouped, with and against thousands of players from across the globe. Players will be able to develop their own commanders, build up a headquarters and deploy an array of vehicles, weapons and technologies acquired though combat, research and crafting.

And there's yet another MMO, this as yet-untitled game is being developed alongside the Syfy channel, although that's pretty much all we know at this stage. If we were willing to bet, we'd say it's not set in a fantasy universe

They Said It...

"The fact of the matter is that we always want all Wii consoles to be connected online, all the time, so Nintendo has never been less than proactive in that kind of endeavour."

Shigeru Miyamoto, president of Nintendo

"LittleBigPlanet, it's nothing but machines shaped like penises and recreations of Mario levels... and Mario penises."

Ashley Burch,
Destructoid correspondent

"With iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations, information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment. All of this is not only putting new pressures on you, it is putting new pressures on our country and on our democracy."

Barak Obama, president of the US



# Rumoured spicy new Guitar Hero game inbound?

...and by spicy we mean Red Hot Chilli Peppers. A recent survey sent out by *Guitar Hero* publisher Activision has asked all sorts of telling questions that shed light on the franchise's future. Similar in concept to previous bandcentric *Guitar Hero* games (such as *Guitar Hero: Metallica* and *Guitar Hero: Van Halen*) the game would feature a plethora of the band's songs from beginning to end. In addition, the survey mentions possible features like "[discovering] the story behind their legendary music as you unlock interviews, retrospectives, concert footage and other commentary".

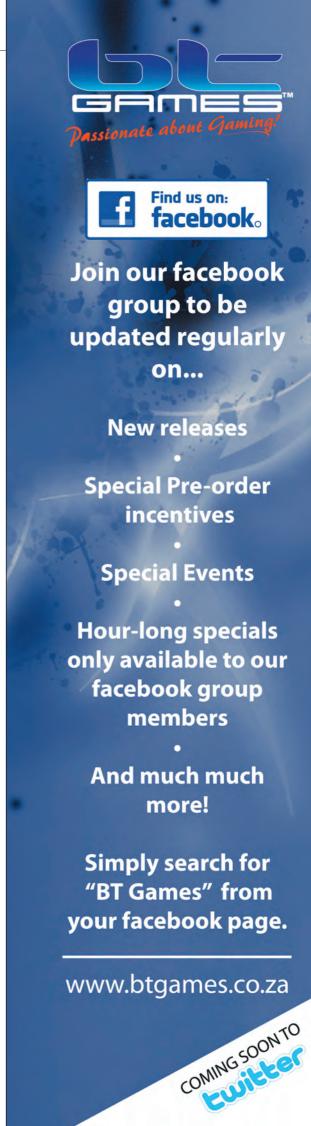
RHCP albums mentioned include *By The Way, Give It Away* and *Californication*. What's more the game, should it make the light of day, would feature the band's "upcoming studio album to be released in 2011".

Quite honestly, we're not sure whether to be excited about this or not. Chilli Peppers fans will undoubtedly be getting ready to rip their shirts off so they can rock-out Anthony Kiedis style, but for those who aren't fans of the band this rumour will obviously leave them reaching for the milk – you know, because milk combats a burning mouth from too many chillies... or is it too many *Guitar Hero* games? We're not sure.

## Gamertag immortality CAN'T be yours!

...because you don't live in Canada, Germany or the United Kingdom – but we do have sunshine, boerewors and NA. For gamers living in those three countries however, EA Canada ran a promotional competition through Twitter whereby people could get their gamertag, PSN IDs or just their names tagged onto the virtual streets of New York in the upcoming *Crysis* 2. So while you're Nanosuit –clad and busy fighting off hordes of whatever the hell we'll be killing in *Crysis* 2, you can stop and stare longingly at fifty different tags and imagine what it would be like to be digitally enshrined for eternity.

For those not content to merely imagine and who are desperate to have their gaming identification deface the virtual landscape, then they'll have to immigrate and build a time machine because the promotional event is very much over. Actually, come to think of it, 99% of South African Xbox LIVE gamers would just need a time machine seeing as how their gamertags are tied to fake UK residential addresses anyway. We really are a resourceful lot, aren't we?



The Beavatar



#### I'm in ur jungle, hiding from ur doods

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of NAG has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'June Beavatar'.

#### Last Month's winner





Melissa Greyling, p38

One person who finds the Beavatar this month will win a Boogily Head sponsored by NAG. Yes, we're cheap.

#### Gaming Charts



PS<sub>3</sub>

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa UFC Undisputed 2010 God of War Collection (I & II) GTA: Episodes from Liberty City Skate 3

#### XBOX 360

Red Dead Redemption

Alan Wake

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

Super Street Fighter IV

#### PS<sub>2</sub>

Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 - Platinum Dance Party: Club Hits

Guitar Hero 5 - Super Bundle

Starcraft II

The Sims 3: Ambitions

Metro 2033

Darksiders

Dawn of War 2: Chaos Rising

#### **PSP**

ModNation Racers Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks Iron Man 2

MX vs. ATV Reflex

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

Big Beach Sports 2 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 NewU Fitness First Mind Body Yoga

Project Runway

NatGeo Quiz! Wild Life

#### DS

Bakugan Battle Trainer

Nancy Drew: The Model Mysteries Transformers: War for Cybertron

Sports Island DS

Shrek Forever After

March 2010 figures provided by GfK www.gfksa.co.za

Sales by game platform

#### PS<sub>3</sub>

God of War III

Final Fantasy XIII

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa

God of War III

God of War III: Ultimate Edition

#### XBOX 360

Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts

Final Fantasy XIII

Grand Theft Auto IV

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa

#### PS<sub>2</sub>

Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa GTA: San Andreas Platinum

God of War II

Grand Theft Auto III

#### PC

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 LE C&C 4: Tiberian Twilight

Assassin's Creed II

The Sims 3: High-End Loft Stuff Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

#### PSP

Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa Need For Speed: Shift GTA: Liberty City Stories God of War: Chains of Olympus

Wii Sports

New Super Mario Bros. Wii

Wii Fit + Balance Board

Wii Sports Resort + MotionPlus

Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks

#### DS

New Super Mario Bros.

Mario Kart DS

Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks

Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

### Bomberman makes guest appearance at US high school

What did you used to do to earn kudos and respect at high school? What do you currently do to earn kudos and respect at high school? Well, what you don't do is what Lars O'Mara, a student at Pensacola High School in Florida, USA, did. Hoping to get his mates some time off school and earn himself that oh-so-sort-after teenage fame, Lars made a fake bomb using a Nintendo Game Boy, a cell phone, duct tape and some loose wires. He then stuck the "bomb" to the underside of a sink in one of the bathrooms. A fellow student found the suspect object and immediately reported it to those in charge at the school. Naturally, the entire student body was evacuated and part one of Lars's devilish scheme was achieved as his friends were free to bum around while the bomb squad attempted to "disarm" the device. Bomb squad members obviously figured out the entire emergency was fake (possibly after the Game Boy screen flashed a message saying, "Thank you Bomb-squad! But our explosives are in another bathroom") and promptly arrested Lars for manufacturing a "hoax explosive device." He now awaits felony charges – pffft, amateur.



### <u>This is not a ruse</u>

Ubisoft's upcoming tabletop RTS RUSE has been delayed until September. According to the developers, the massive amount of feedback that they received from the public beta has given them loads of food for thought, especially when it comes to the areas of unit selection, order assignment, unit behaviour, Al, anti-lag policies and even the menu system. All of those aspects, as well as a few others, will be given a serious looking-at, which should result in a better, more polished and more appealing RTS.



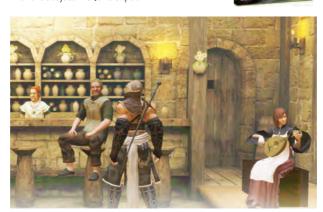
#### Distributors

AMD	[044] 384-0225
Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
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ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
BT Games	[011] 886-8834
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Syntech	0861 274 244
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If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679

#### Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will a copy of SBK X for Xbox 360 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'June Caption'.



**NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:** "Stop me if you've heard this one before: Two guys and a chick with a lute walk into a bar..."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER: "He has a bad case of bed head!" - Nicola Vermeulen

# Nintendo isn't making quite as much money as they used to

While the rest of the world scrambled for loose change and cut costs in every possible way in recent years, Nintendo has gone from strength to strength over the last six years and all the way through the recession. Not once during that time did their profits slip, until now. For the first time in six years, Nintendo will reportedly show a drop in profit. Now, that doesn't mean that they're losing money, just that they're not

making quite the same ridiculous sums that they've been making until now. With rumours of the WiiHD everywhere you look, and a confirmed 3D successor to their money-printing machine, the Nintendo DS, on the way, we doubt very much that this downward trend will continue for much longer.





Dates subject to change without notice

#### JUNE: WEEK 1

The Witcher: Enhanced Edition - Platinum	PC
The Sims 3: Ambitions	PC
No More Heroes 2	Wii

#### JUNE: WEEK 2

Prince of Persia:	PC
The Forgotten Sands	

#### JUNE: WEEK 4

Demon's Souls	PS3
Transformers: War for Cybertron	PC, 360, PS3, Wii, DS
International Cricket Captain 2010	360, PS3
Toy Story 3	PC, 360, PS3, Wii, DS, PSP

## Monopoly Streets in threeeeee-deeeee!

Ah, Monopoly: the only board game that is guaranteed to cause a weeklong family feud, tears and at least one visit to the emergency room; well in some families at least. Hasbro and EA have decided that they are no longer content allowing the 2D board game version of Monopoly to be the only version destroying family relationships across the globe. Instead, they will be bringing out *Monopoly Streets*, which won't be the first videogame outing for the 75 year old board game, but will feature a full 3D game world for players to play the classic game in. As players buy properties and develop buildings so the city and its suburbs will morph around them. The game is set for release on PS3, Xbox 360 and the Wii. 360 and Wii players will be able to utilise their avatars and Miis respectively as in-game characters, with the population of the cities being made up of avatars and Miis on gamers' friends lists. In addition, the Xbox version will feature a number of Monopoly themed avatar goodies. Online multiplayer will feature as well so you'll be able to destroy your relationships with other people no matter where they are in the world. And what better time to herald the destruction of family love and stability than on Christmas, as the game is set to ship this festive season!



# BLACK BLACK BDPS

Mark Lamia



Adam Gascoine



ark clouds have been swirling around the Call of Duty series recently. Publisher Activision and developer Infinity Ward are embroiled in nasty lawsuits with each other; studio heads have been fired; employees have resigned. And the gaming media is spewing more hot air than an Icelandic volcano, postulating about whether or not this is the death knell of one of the most successful gaming franchises in history.

So with this giant ash cloud of discontent hovering about, you'd be forgiven for maybe not being as excited as normal about the next instalment in the series. Don't tell that to the guys over at Treyarch Studio, though. The team working at "that other studio that makes CoD in between Infinity Ward games" has been operating silently for the last year odd on their next game, and now they're ready to step out from behind the veil of secrecy.

Last month, NAG was privileged to be one of just a handful of magazines invited to Los Angeles to get a behind-the-scenes look at Call of Duty: Black Ops. The seventh game in the Call of Duty series will leave World War II behind, but it won't jump all the way ahead to the Modern Warfare period depicted in Infinity Ward's last two games. Instead, Treyarch has opted to set the game during the 1960s and tell the story of the secret, covert conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War.

"This period in history is largely unexplored from a gaming point of view," says Adam Gascoine, design director at Treyarch. "There's a tonne of recently declassified information about this time period that we could draw from that no one has really touched yet. So while the story itself is a work of fiction, it's based in real events and places."

Joining Adam is Mark Lamia, the head

of Treyarch Studio. The pair invites us back into their base of operations. American and Russian propaganda posters from the 50s and 60s hang on the walls, interspersed with concept art from the game. Other walls have black sheets hung over them, hiding images and information that the game designers are still keeping secret. The lighting here is low, and people talk to each other in hushed tones. A few sets of eyes follow us as we walk past the section of the studio housing the team working on the multiplayer component of the game and we enter "the bunker."

"Welcome to MAC-T," says Mark. "That stands for Military Assistance Command, Treyarch." What was once "a perfectly good movie room" has been converted to look like a Cold War-era military command bunker.

"We wanted to make it look like something they'd use at NORAD," says Adam.

Red lights glow around the perimeter of the 6x12 meter room. The walls have been remodelled to look like they're made from slabs of solid concrete. At one end, there are two rows of large leather theatre chairs, facing a huge projection screen where black smoke swirls around the game logo. At the other end of the room, two huge stacks of computer servers maddeningly blink their red lights. On the walls are photographs of a young Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, still images of John F. Kennedy taken from the Zapruder film and photographs and schematics of Russian nuclear submarines. In the centre of the room is a long, narrow conference table etched in black and white with a world map and latitude and longitude lines. At the far end, red lights flash ominously on a 1960s-style telephone.

"If you have a look around the room, you might pick up some hints as to what the game is going to be about," Mark says. "Are you going to tell us who really shot JFK?"

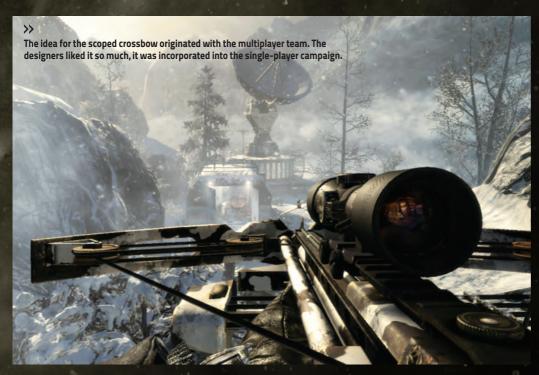






"Absolutely everything has been overhauled on this engine to make the game we wanted to make. And the goal is to make the ultimate *Call of Duty* game and set the bar for the genre."

- Mark Lamia, head of Treyarch



"It was Lee Harvey Oswald," says Adam quickly, a grin stretching across his face.

Mark and Adam invite us to take a seat in front of the screen and set the scene for what we're about to see. The four levels from the game, constituting well over an hour of gameplay, is more than they've ever revealed of a work in progress before, testament to how well the development on *Black Ops* is running. Another member of the Treyarch team grabs an Xbox 360 controller; the volume on the speakers gets cranked up to an earth-rumbling level. The room goes dark.

#### **WMD**

The first level we're shown is called WMD. It takes place on a snow-covered landscape in the Ural Mountains in 1968 and is played from the perspective of member of an elite Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored undercover group called Operation 40. The character, named Hudson, is investigating an old Soviet munitions factory, which the CIA says is no longer in use. That turns out not to be the case.

As the level begins, you're standing on a runway, the buzz of jet engines all around. You're the pilot of an SR-71 Blackbird, a long-range US spy airplane capable of speeds in excess of Mach 3. The plane accelerates down the runway and soars into the upper atmosphere. Cruising high above the earth, you switch to a camera tracking an insertion team on the ground. As they infiltrate the facility, you give them orders, assisting them with avoiding enemy patrols. While the team hides in the back of a building, a squad of enemy soldiers jumps from the back of a truck and heads toward their location. The camera zooms down to the ground, and you take control of Hudson. As you lie prone in the snow, the patrol walks right past your position, close enough to touch. After they pass, using a crossbow with a telescopic sight, you track the movement of enemy soldiers [You did just say crossbow with telescopic sight right? Ed]. The team stealthily sneaks around the back of the facility. Using the crossbow and silenced weapons, the

team takes out a few guards.
An alarm sounds. You've been spotted, and now all hell breaks loose.

All of a sudden, the game becomes familiar again as you engage in an old-school *Call of Duty* fire fight. Using explosive arrows, grenades and automatic weapons, the team takes out a few squads of enemies before moving on. Running around to the other side of the building, they latch onto a railing and rappel down the side of the mountain. Swinging off a ledge, you shoot out a window and crash into the control room of the facility. In a slow-motion breach sequence, reminiscent of those in *Modern Warfare 2*, you shoot a few surprised enemies then engage in another massive gun battle.

At the end of the fight, you sabotage something in the control room, and the team starts to exfiltrate. As you run along a steel catwalk, an enemy soldier fires an RPG at the team, destroying the bridge and triggering an avalanche. Running for their lives, the team base jumps off the edge of the mountain as the scane fados to black.

the scene fades to black.
"Pretty intense, huh?" Mark asks as the lights come back on, an imploring smile brightening his face. "What we've tried to show you with this level is a real variety in







"On the walls are photographs of a young Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, still images of John F. Kennedy taken from the Zapruder film and photographs and schematics of Russian nuclear submarines."







gameplay: there's stealth, squad control, a rappel section, the slow-mo breach in addition to the regular action you'd expect in a *Call of Duty* game. We've tried to incorporate variety like this into all the levels of the game."

"The idea behind this," Adam adds in, "is to keep the action fresh and interesting. It's also used as a pacing tool by varying the speed of the game between the stealthy sections and more action-packed parts."

#### SLAUGHTERHOUSE

The next level of the game we're shown takes us to Southeast Asia, to *Hue* City in South Vietnam near the border with the North. *Hue* was also the home of the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, or MAC-V, the headquarters of the ClA's "Studies and Observation Group," or SOG, during the Vietnam War. Members of SOG were handpicked from the elite among the different branches of US Special Forces. (One of these soldiers, Maj. John Plaster, was a military advisor on the game.) SOG defined the rules of warfare and engagement as they went along and had access to the best, newest, and even experimental weaponry the US armed forces had to offer.

forces had to offer.

In 1968, during the Tet Offensive, the city was overrun by the North Vietnamese Army. In this mission the player character, an SOG agent, has to fight his way through burning buildings and streets as the NVA invades, massacring groups of civilians in its wake. One of the more interesting parts of this level occurs when you commandeer a radio from a wounded Marine and use it to call in helicopter gunship fire on buildings occupied with NVA troops. We also get to see some of that experimental weaponry, in this case a shotgun that fires incendiary shells.

#### VICTOR CHARLIE

"You can't do southeast Asia without some jungle," Adam says introducing the next portion of the game. This level is set in Laos as the SOG goes after a Soviet general believed to be operating from the country.

"We had to develop a lot of new technology for the game engine here," Mark says. "It's 'Jungle 2.0' and 'Water 2.0' compared to what we used in *World at War.*"

The mission begins as you try to escape from a crashed helicopter. It's gone down in a river, the pilot is dead and water is pouring through the smashed windscreen as it starts to sink. Making matters worse is the band of Viet Cong ambushers in boats, peppering the chopper with machine guns.

You finally wrench the door open and swim for safety as bullets zip through the water around you. From underwater, you spot one of the attackers' boats and climb aboard. Grabbing him by the neck, you use him as a "meat shield" while you mow down his friends with his AK-47. To cap off the encounter, as you fire at the final enemy, the scene switches to *Matrix*-style slow-motion bullet time and follows the flight of the bullet as it takes off the top of the last ambusher's head.

A bit later on in the level, after a stealth section and another gun battle, we get to witness one of the creepiest – and what will probably end up being one of the most memorable – *Call of Duty* sequences ever made. The SOG squad finds the entrance to a network of VC tunnels and decides to go in. With just a flashlight and a .44 Magnum,

you drop into the darkness. In the meterhigh tunnels, water pools on the floor, tree roots reach out like grasping arms, rats scurry around corners, and cockroaches

scatter on the walls.

As a squad mate in front of you turns to say something, an ambusher lunges out of the darkness and stabs him in the neck before you can react. Further down the tunnel, you come to a cave where more enemies lie in wait. The beam of your flashlight draws their attention, so you have to switch it off and engage them in total darkness, the only sense of your surroundings coming from muzzle flashes.

The tension and intensity of the game really start to come through now, and driving that is the quality of the performances by the actors. The reason, Adam and Mark say, is the technology they used to capture the performances called full motion capture – which records body movements, facial expressions and voices simultaneously. For more on that, see the box "Capturing the moment'

There's a reason this is the level we're shown last, because it's a showstopper

"I'm gonna sit back here with you guys for this one," says Adam, taking up a chair in front of the movie screen. "I just love this level!" After raiding a Russian military base

deep inside the jungles of Laos, you and another SOG operative hijack a Hind helicopter gunship and go looking for trouble. Using the left analogue stick of the Xbox controller to operate the helicopter and the right stick to aim, you follow a river down a canyon in search of enemy's HQ. In the orgy of destruction that follows, you get to blow up boats, trucks, buildings, an oil pipeline and other helicopters.

Unlike other sequences in earlier Call of Duty games where you've fought from a vehicle, this isn't an on-rails shooter section. You have full control of the helicopter and can fly anywhere in the canyon and destroy just

about everything.

"This mission really pushes the limit of what we can do with the game engine and the 360," Mark says. "The previous maximum number of units we could have on screen at one time was about 23-25. This level necessitated so much more, because as the helicopter rises up, your field of view increases dramatically. There are areas you go through here that have 50-plus enemies in them.

Black Ops runs on the World at War engine, which is a modified version of the Call of Duty 4 game engine. All of the improvements made since then are Treyarch's work: there will be no Infinity Ward technology in this game beyond what was in the original Modern Warfare.

"Absolutely everything has been overhauled on this engine to make the game we wanted to make," Mark says. "And the goal is to make the ultimate Call of Duty game and set the bar for the genre

We'll find out on November 9th if that claim holds up, but if the if the hour of gameplay we saw is any indication of the final product – and there's no reason to think it isn't – then Black Ops will be the new benchmark for the Call of Duty series. NAG

**Chris Bistline** 



"With just a flashlight and a .44 Magnum, you drop into the darkness. In the meter-high tunnels, water pools on the floor, tree roots reach out like grasping arms, rats scurry around corners, and cockroaches scatter on the walls."















#### "Run XCOM! Study Them! Stop Them!" Them, being aliens.

**GENRE** > FPS

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

F YOU WERE ALIVE and aware during the 1990s, reminisce along. If not, you might glean sudden weapon-like insight on your elders. Or you're dead. Creepy.

It was a time of cartoons for kids and adults alike: Freakazoid, The Simpsons, South Park, Pinky and the Brain and Gargoyles. Disney pulled an episode of Gargoyles because it showed someone being wounded by a gunshot. The episode was about teaching gun safety to kids. That may be irony. Star Trek: The Next Generation was at the height of its popularity. The studio decided to cancel it before it lost popularity. They were afraid of running it into the ground, something they'd do to great success later. Forrest Gump, Titanic, Toy Story, Clerks, 12 Monkeys and Terminator 2: Judgement Day gave us a lot to look forward to. Creed, Van Halen, Bloodhound Gang, Goo Goo Dolls, System of a Down, Blur, Queensrych, Green Day and Alice in Chains gave us a lot to listen to. But for the gamer at heart, it was the PC that gave us the most to do.

#### SYMPHONY OF CIRCUITS

For any gamer with a primary focus on the PC, it wasn't just a platform with its own unique games, separating it from the evolving console industry of the time. It was a movement.

The "notes" section in the back of game manuals was very much appreciated. Manuals themselves were part of the gaming experience, filled with delicious concept art. The general climate was one of social interaction in gaming, not online,

but to meet other people who played PC games. Camaraderie was sought. Especially in the fledgling PC gaming industry of South Africa, the LAN Party was the event. Because any big LAN Party was a rare thing, networking was complicated, expensive. The transition from IPX to TCP/IP was a giant paradigm shift for gamer networking.

If you didn't play multiplayer something, you were most certainly being informed that you *should*. Single-player was King, but in the mid-90s games like Doom, Duke Nukem 3D, Quake, Death Rally and Blood would soon overthrow the monarchy. Hardware-accelerated 3D graphics were still newborn and super-expensive, not having filtered down to generic brands yet.

Gaming on the PC was a rite of passage, one that instilled a sense of things having to be "set up just right". Everything from your first self-built computer to your first hosting of a LAN party. There was pride taken in one's rig being sleek, functional and tuned. The tide of useless aesthetic bling, neon lights in Perspex cases, was still a few years away. The only thing that mattered, was playing the games.

#### ALIENS IN THE DARK

Midway through the decade came an unassuming little British game about aliens shooting you from shadowy corners. Those bastard aliens were capable of really pissing you off. For many, X-COM was their first introduction to the turn-based action game. Until then, turnbased was a genre generally only used by people trying to simulate a realistic "tank vs. plane" outcome in World War II. The World War II first-person shooter would only become its own genre in a few years





### UFO Hot Potato

MicroProse owned the X-COM name back in 1995. Since then, it has changed hands to Hasbro Interactive in 1998 due to a merger. Then it went to Infogrames Entertainment when they bought Hasbro Interactive in 2001. Infogrames was renamed to Atari, who in 2005 sold the property to Take-Two Interactive. Against all odds, Take Two realised it had the license and decided to make something of it. So it's a miracle, if you consider how other publishers are sitting on old franchises they inherited but have done nothing with, that we're getting anything X-COM related at all.

The original X-COM/ UFO had a bug, in that no matter what you set it to, the game was always on Easy difficulty.



"Human ingenuity – and frailty – against a foe beyond comprehension"

still. No other game would ever quite make the same impact. So, X-COM was the first and the last hurrah of the genre.

On the flip side, many gamers missed ever playing X-COM. There was a lot going on in those years. To such people, it will go unnoticed that Take Two's new XCOM (notice the missing hyphen) is both a remake and a giant departure from its original source material.

#### DEMONSTRATE-ABLY DELICIOUS

It's dark inside the covert prohibitionera themed speak-easy, hidden away in a corner of San Francisco's low-town district. At the back of the establishment, behind a bar, a secret door swings open and we sidle through its narrow aperture. It's 2K Marin, developers of BioShock 2! You do good work, guys. What's this? You're going to show us XCOM? Fantastic! It's a first-person shooter? Cool/Weird, depending on if you played the original.

Do your thing!

Welcome to the 1950s, but is this the real life, or is it just fantasy? Our demonstrator first-persons around the United States XCOM headquarters, heading somewhere. It's not the bleak science-fiction future of the original series, nor the art-deco 50s of BioShock's jazzy pop-philosophy water park. It's not the real 1950s, the one where America wrote itself into its own Truman Show and consumerism exploded thanks to World War II veterans having a lot of money and nothing to do. This is the 1950s as if the scripted saccharine "nuclear-family" idyllic reality on television at the time was the real deal, and a counter-alien insurgency agency, XCOM, was formed because clearly Duck And Cover (see box) wasn't going to cut it against "little green men'

Developed by staff that worked on both BioShock and its sequel, it's clear it's the BioShock engine with some

#### Duck and Cover!

Few things summarise a decade as well as this video showing what to do if a nuke drops near you. Produced by the American government during the Cold War of the 1950s to "educate" its children about proper safety when dealing with a nuclear detonation, it's a small yet incredibly telling piece of American culture. If you've ever played Fallout, you'll recognize it for all the parodies you've seen centred around its peculiar brand of bizarre. Watch it online here: www.youtube. com/watch?v=COK\_LZDXpOI



#### Aftermath, Aftershock. Afterlight

You may have come across developer ALTAR's homage trilogy to X-COM, namely UFO: Aftermath (2003), UFO: Aftershock (2005) and UFO. Afterlight (2007). While good on their own merits and clearly heavily inspired by the original source material, all three were rough around the edges but still worth a look if you're a serious fan.

refinements. XCOM, as an organization, needs Elerium to function. An alien element that started to appear on Earth, it, along with money and research, has led to incredible new technology that XCOM uses to track and study alien events in secret. The public need not know what terrors come from space.

#### WELCOME TO XCOM

XCOM headquarters is your staging area, an interactive hive of activity with era-appropriate characters wandering around doing their jobs for you to explore. We start in the Communications Centre, telephone operators in the background listening in on everyone. They're searching for "key phrases" that indicate alien activity. This gets marked on the giant mission map on one wall of the Communications Centre. It shows the entire United States, with selectable pegs indicating missions. Missions make note of the "key phrases" that triggered them being of interest to XCOM, which vaguely hints at what type of aliens and events are taking place in that area. Initially you may not know what they mean, so you won't know what weapons/gadgets to take, an intentional design choice.

Doing one mission may cause another to "time out" and disappear. There is clearly a strong linear narrative going on here, with hints at a randomlygenerated, systemic mission system that can fill in the gaps between. There was plenty of emergent, systemic

gameplay in BioShock, which would translate well into this theme.

A quick run to the Engineering Department, which makes you nice weapons and gadgets that can be tested at the Firing Range. The Science Centre is empty and lights are off - there is currently no Research being doing, because you lack any alien weapons or technology to examine. You collect research in the field by using a camera, taking photos of things which then unlock gadgets to research and produce.

Getting into the car fades to black and you head to your selected mission, with two A.I. controlled partners in tow. The developers decline to comment on if you can outfit or equip your partners yourself, or what happens when, not if, they die.

#### SLEEPY CREEPY SUBURBIA

The mission is a three-block neighbourhood, complete with houses and a few of them even have detailed interiors. White picket fences, perfectly manicured lawns, the perfect suburbia. Except it's completely deserted. Black goop trails lead to dissolved bodies, dead people in cars reduced to skeletons. Snap a few photos for Research. Check the map (which is held up to the "camera", the game does not pause), explore some more. Try to figure out what the "key phrase" meant, when it talked about "strange seismic activity, extreme winds". Black goop attacks from air-vents, shooting it with guns doesn't seem to help. A previously researched







#### Meanwhile, Elsewhere...

X-COM: UFO Defense (a.k.a. UFO: Enemy Unknown in Europe) was loosely inspired by the 1970s British science-fiction television series, UFO. Created by the Gollop brothers in 1994, the pair enjoyed success with the game, which went on to sell more than 600,000 units on the PC platform alone. Half the sales were in the USA, rare for a European game at the time.

When X-COM became a huge hit for publisher MicroProse, they wanted more and produced their own follow-up, X-COM: Terror from the Deep while the Gollop brothers worked on their sequel, X-COM: Apocalypse. "Once MicroProse realised that they had a money-making machine on their hands they wanted more of the same and wanted more say in the project. We felt that we no longer had much control over our creation", says Julian Gollop.

For a slice of context, here are then some of the games that PC gamers were probably enjoying around the same time as each of the various X-COM games:

UFO: Enemy Unknown (1994) - The original, with a unique experience still to this day. Alone in the Dark 3, Beneath a Steel Sky, Doom II, Ecstatica, Heretic, Jazz Jackrabbit, Magic Carpet, SimTower, System Shock.

X-COM: Terror from the Deep (1995) - A reskin of the original with Lovecraft themes. The 11th Hour, BioForge, Descent, The

Dig, Hexen, Hi-Octane, MechWarrior 2, Phantasmagoria, Star Wars: Dark Forces. Quake pre-release hype was huge.

#### X-COM: Apocalypse (1997) - Real-time combat, focused on one city instead of entire planet.

Diablo, Age of Empires, Blood, The Curse of Monkey Island, Dungeon Keeper, Grand Theft Auto, KKnD, MDK, Oddworld: Abe's Odyssey, Postal, Redneck Rampage, Shadow Warrior, SubSpace, Tanarus, Tomb Raider II, Total Annihilation, Ultima Online, Wing Commander: Prophecy, Quake II.

#### X-COM: Interceptor (1998) - Estranged Wing Commander clone with X-COM themes.

Action Quake 2, Baldur's Gate, Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now, Die by the Sword, Fallout 2, Forsaken (ooh, Descent with colours), Heretic II, Hexplore, Jurassic Park: Trespasser, Sin, StarCraft and StarCraft: Brood War, Starsiege: Tribes, Thief: The Dark Project, Unreal, the almighty Half-Life.

#### X-COM: Enforcer (2001) - Bizarre thirdperson shooter from another dimension.

Anachronox, Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura, Bejeweled, Clive Barker's Undying, Diablo II: Lord of Destruction, Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter, Max Payne, Oni, Red Faction, Serious Sam.







grenade, made from intelligence gathered about these specific aliens, makes short work of them. They appear to be highly combustible. Health regenerates if it's below 10 (out of 100). Finding an Elerium crystal surrounded by black goop, represents an angry hornet's nest of trouble. Leave it, or try to get the precious resource. That's the question.

Suddenly, a big ring-like multidimensional alien that's only half in, half out of our reality, appears in the sky. Everything it shoots with its cannon dissolves into little chunks. It's uncaring, and between you and your escape - the car you arrived in. You can leave a mission at any time by going back to the car. The chatter between your A.I. partners suddenly climaxes with one getting taken out by the alien, dissolving into guttural screams. Fade to black. And that's the XCOM demonstration. Talk about a tease, huh? Hopefully, more will be shown at

this year's E3. The team is tight-lipped about any additional locations, aliens and gameplay concepts.

#### WILL IT BLEND?

The original creators of X-COM are not involved in this game. Even though it's a first-person shooter, the XCOM base is a reasonable facsimile of the idea behind the original game's strategic management sections. It's not better, just different.

It's the classic struggle, humanity versus an unknown enemy. The firstperson view puts you "in the shoes" of the XCOM agent, and all that entails. It's high-stake odds, with risky strategic gambits. Tension and fear seem to be key proponents of what the developers are trying to do. "Human ingenuity – and frailty – against a foe beyond comprehension", says the official press release. It's an ambitious vision. NAG

Miktar Dracon



Halo: Reach's ordnance has been mixed up a bit since its last deployment. The Covenant Carbine's been replaced by a Needler Rifle that's pretty much what it says on the box, while the UNSC's beloved burst fire Battle Rifle's changed out for a semi-automatic Designated Marksman Rifle. Then there's wait for it, wait for it... wait for it – a Plasma Launcher. Yes, that's a grenade launcher that spits out loads of sticky grenades simultaneously. It's like I died and went to wherever it is that my dreams come true. Except it seems I keep dying on the business end of this thing instead.



**Halo: Reach Multiplayer Beta** 

Reach out and punch me, dun dun da-dun dun

**GENRE** > FPS

**360** PS3 WII

**DON'T TELL UNREAL TOURNAMENT** that I said this, but, well, I've been seeing Halo a bit on the side. It's not super serious or anything, but we get on. Halo knows how to make a girl feel special - mostly with sticky grenades. So when the Halo: Reach beta went live, I fooled around on Facing Worlds for a couple of rounds while it was downloading, then told Unreal Tournament I had to work late for, like, two weeks. And hey, since I was commissioned to do this hands-on preview, it wasn't even technically a proper lie. Kinda. Actually, due to chaotic fluctuations on the space-time continuum and the implacable demands of the Great and Terrible Beast of Printe Deädlyne, I had only two days scrumming about in the beta before writing this, but it's not like Unreal Tournament is ever going to find out or anything.

That does, however, bring me around to the point. It's Day 2 of the Halo: Reach multiplayer beta, and as yet, the only new game modes on show-and-kill are Headhunter and Stockpile, with Invasion and Generator Defence dropping in later, and the only two maps currently available are Powerhouse and Sword Base. I've arranged to have the schedule guy over at Bungie poisoned for this outrageous inconvenience, but in the meantime then, let's play with what we've got.

#### GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

Headhunter is actually somewhat similar to Unreal Tournament's Greed game mode, with one significant difference. The big idea is to rush about, murder people, and grab the flaming skulls that tumble from their recently humiliated carcasses. Then you drop your haul of skulls off at one of







#### Locked and load...outed

Halo: Reach chucks Halo 3's Equipment pickups, and swaps them for something like class packages, dubbed Load Outs here. These aren't user defined, but vary instead according to the playlist or game mode.

For UNSC units, each one includes starting primary and secondary weapons, grenades, and an Armour Ability. The Armour Abilities more or less resemble the old Equipment pickups. The Stalker Load Out, for example, features a combination of Halo 3's Active Camo and Radar Jammer, while the Assault Load Out bundles a jetpack. A \*\*\*\*ing jetpack!

Armour Abilities pull on a limited energy resource, which recharges over time once it's all guzzled up.

Elsewhere, playing as the Elites is an altogether different sort of thing. They don't get Armor Abilities, but they're bigger, faster, and packing better shielding than those stupid, meaty UNSC grunts. In addition, Elites can get the Evade combat roll manoeuvre - a mad leap in any direction that's something really nasty in close quarters. Not least of all because "close quarters" is always so suddenly and brutally relevant.







There's all the campy spectacle and giddy physics you'd expect from a Halo title, but the franchise is definitely moving forward into something subtly more sophisticated.



Bungie's totally maxed out Halo 3's now somewhat, uh, mature engine with Halo: Reach - the game's UNSC Assault Rifle model apparently packs more polygons than an entire Marine from Halo 3. That probably wasn't hard. There's also increased dynamic lighting, improved texture filtering, screen space ambient occlusion, and a bunch of other important sounding junk most people don't even notice because they're too busy swearing at everyone else.



two randomly spawned – and constantly relocated - scoring zones. I started a new sentence there, because it's in between those two directives that anything can and will go all sorts of very, very wrong. See, if you're taken out with skulls in your pockets, they'll fall out, and anyone else can simply claim your hard-won battle trophies for their own. Oh, the ignominy! And just to keep things really interesting (really nightmarish), anyone carrying skulls gets a numbered marker above their heads, advertising their potential payload to cheap predators like me.

#### NO FLAG, NO POINT, YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE!

It's perhaps somewhat inscrutable at first play, but Stockpile's actually a clever variant of Capture the Flag. At the beginning of each round, six flags are spawned - one in each team's base, and four neutral flags around the map. The objective here is to grab as many flags as you can, and deposit them in your team's base. Every 60 seconds, the flags in each base are counted and scored. But what looks straightforward enough in sentences is an unrelenting riot in practice. Since flags can be swiped from the enemy's base, there's a constant pushpull-OH-NO-YOU-DIDN'T dynamic going on all over the place, as both teams scrap over the spoils of reckless enterprise.

### THE OBLIGATORY 'COMBAT EVOLVED' SUB-HEADER

My friends and I have always called Halo "Halols", and *Reach* looks to be holding on to this sobriquet with vim, verve, and violence. There's all the campy spectacle and giddy physics you'd expect from a Halo title, but the franchise is definitely moving forward into something subtly more sophisticated. It's still unmistakably Halo, of course, and Halo's always been one of those games that instantly polarises gamers - love it, hate it - but there's no denying its class. What Halo does, Halo does with consummate style and ingenuity. And sticky grenades.

Tarryn van der Byl













**Split Second: Velocity** 

Feel the need to blur the splitting wipe-out... or something

**GENRE** > Arcade racer

**360 PS3** WII PS2

**OW MANY TIMES HAVE** you ground your way up the ranks in a race of *Need* for Speed, wishing and praying for a way to take down the opponent ahead of you who manages to drive a perfect line no matter how many naughty words you hurl in his direction? The bottom line is; there's nothing quite like blowing up the guy who just overtook you. This is nothing new to the racing genre, but the amount of ridiculous explosions and eye-candy present here are enough to stack this game next to any one of Michael Bay's productions.

This is a game that's all about blowing things up: vehicles, buildings, bridges and entire sections of track can be destroyed by every single driver on the road, through a system called Power Play. PP points can be earned by performing all the typical arcade racer stuff: drifting, drafting, overtaking, smashing into enemies and narrowly avoiding all the nasty things that tend to fly at you more frequently the further up the running you go. However, Power Plays can only be activated at certain points of the track - when there's an enemy vehicle close enough to you and the trap you wish to spring on them; this is in stark contrast to the likes of Wipeout or the more recent Blur that allow you to use your weapons at will. However, the tracks in Split Second are excellently designed, and are sure to keep you on your toes and any spectators shouting in joy or misery when huge chunks of the gaming environment come crashing down around you, which will happen a lot.

In case it wasn't made obvious, Split Second attempts to not take itself too seriously. The premise of the game is that each player is a contestant on a TV show, and must play through a series of seasons, each with a number of episodes, to ultimately be crowned as the Split Second champion. From the game's over-the-top menus filled with



From the game's over-the-top menus filled with shattered glass, explosions and fire, to the gameplay itself, everything about Split Second screams "ridiculous, bone-crunching action."

#### Power Plays



Split Second is a no-nonsense arcade racer, but it will reward those players who take the time to learn the course and attempt to play more tactically than their opponents. Knowing where each PP event is along the track, and what its effect will be, is as important as earning the points to unleash them. Certain Power Plays will send inflamed trucks careening into the road ahead, creating a permanent, smouldering road hazard for anyone behind you, while others engage cranes or helicopters to drop or catapult their (sometimes explosive) payload into anyone unlucky enough to be nearby. Some will topple entire buildings

that send out a damaging and distracting shockwave. Other Power Plays can be used less aggressively, and give the leader of the pack a chance to use this valuable resource, by briefly unlocking shortcuts through the map. If you manage to build a reserve of three Power Plays (the maximum amount), you'll even have the opportunity to permanently and drastically change certain parts of the tracks, with ramps, tunnels and entire roads that would otherwise be inaccessible. The combinations of one-shot powers with those that change the layout of the track are sure to combine to keep the game's tracks as interesting as possible

The game's minimalist HUD is well-suited, as it's hard enough taking your eyes off the action for a second to watch the destruction as it rains down around your opponents. This way, everything you need is in one place: your car. There's not even a speedometer to be













shattered glass, explosions and fire, to the gameplay itself, everything about Split Second screams "ridiculous, bone-crunching action."

As you make your way through the career mode, you'll unlock new (unlicensed) vehicles, each with its own strong and weak points. Certain cars are designed for speed, or handling, while others are better for absorbing damage from Power Plays or drifting around corners. For those of you who are terrified of even opening your bonnet, you're in luck; as a pure arcade racer there is almost no vehicle customisation in Split Second, aside from a paint job or a few stickers.

During our time with Split Second, it's clear that Blurisn't the only arcade racer out for first prize this year. The game's mix of brutal racing with meaty physics and the Power Play system makes you really feel like you're racing through a city that's been designed for destruction.

**Geoff Burrows** 

**>>** 

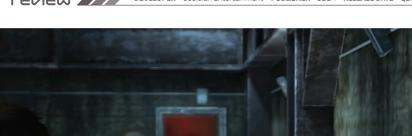
While there isn't a licensed vehicle in sight, each car still looks remarkably similar to the type of vehicles we're used to seeing in games like this. This way, Black Rock gets to blow them up without a care for what the manufacturers think, which we're certainly happy with.

#### Game modes

Throughout the career mode, players will encounter and unlock six different game modes that are spread across 16 different track settings (each with a number of variations). The standard Race Mode is present, in which contestants battle it out to be the first car across the finish line after a number of laps. Next is the already well-known Elimination Mode, in which the contestant in last place after every period of time will be kicked out of the race. Survival Mode is perhaps the most interesting: in it, you race against a number of trucks that have a habit of chucking explosive barrels at the other vehicles on the road. You'll have to use the other drivers (as shields) and your slick handling to avoid destruction, while attempting to overtake as many big rigs as possible before the time runs out. Air Strike is

a mode that pits you against a military attack helicopter that's hell-bent on blowing you up. As you attempt to get to the finish line, you'll have to dodge incoming missile strikes that will either throw you off course or out-right destroy your car. Get wrecked three times and its game over. Detonator is a slightly similar mode, in which you'll race against the clock to beat your opponent's ghost times, while the level automatically activates Power Plays all around you. It starts off nice and gentle, but before too long you'll be dodging exploding trucks, crumbling buildings and derailed trains at almost every turn. The final game mode is Air Revenge, but we unfortunately weren't able to get tucked into this mode, but rest assured it'll be something involving copious amounts of mayhem and general destruction.





#### Stay in the shadows

While it's certainly possible to play Alpha Protocol like a gung-ho crack addict in search of his next fix, the game's many security cameras, locked doors and hackable terminals encourage a stealthier, more careful pace through the missions. Players will have to keep out of sight and earshot of enemy soldiers while performing silent takedowns and engaging in any one of the three microgames to hack terminals and alarms, pick locks or rewire electronic controls. And, no, the game doesn't pause while you're trying to do all of this, which makes for a fair bit of panic when you're trying to crack a safe in between intercepting enemy patrols.







## Alpha Protocol

Secret agent man

**GENRE** > Action-RPG

**360 PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

WHEN THE US GOVERNMENT has to deal with the dirtiest, most nefarious deeds on the planet, they can't use the FBI or CIA; they need an organisation that operates outside the bounds of the law. They need Alpha Protocol. Nothing of this organisation's super-ultra-secret missions can ever be traced back to the source, and all agents are forced to go rogue, or "Alpha Protocol" - disavowing themselves of everything and anything from their past lives, organisations or connections. They are perfect, and disposable, agents.

One particular agent, Mike Thorton, wakes up in a hospital, drugged and unsure of how he got there. After a brief tango with the guards, an escape attempt and his ultimate capture, he finds that he's just undergone the rather unfriendly indoctrination procedure for AP. You play as Mike, and after a few tutorial missions, you'll be thrown into the middle of a Middle-East arms deal, full

of terrorists and other people who want to shoot you, that needs to be cracked. A few missions into the game, it becomes clear that there's something funny going on, and Mike soon finds himself wrapped up in a conspiracy that leaves him with few friends, loads of enemies and even more questions.

Alpha Protocol is a bit of a mixed bag in terms of genre, but can best be described as a game that straddles the rather broad line between Mass Effect and Splinter Cell. It's an action-RPG, which means that it's light on the role-playing, but doesn't skimp on character interaction and development thanks to its simple but effective QTElike dialogue system that you've probably seen in either Mass Effect or Fahrenheit. It's nothing revolutionary, but from what we've experienced so far, it's a great way to move conversations along without bogging the player down with the finicky bits. You usually have a choice between three or four dialogue options, such as suave, aggressive, professional and direct; the resulting response often has an effect on your reputation with the person with whom









Obsidian Entertainment was formed from the ashes of legendary development studio Black Isle Entertainment, the team that developed the first two Fallout and Icewind Dale games as well as co-developed *Baldur's* Gate (and its sequel and expansions) and Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader. The company is also working on a new
Wheel of Time game based on the epic fantasy series by the late James Oliver Rigney Jr. (AKA Robert Jordan), alongside Red Eagle Games.

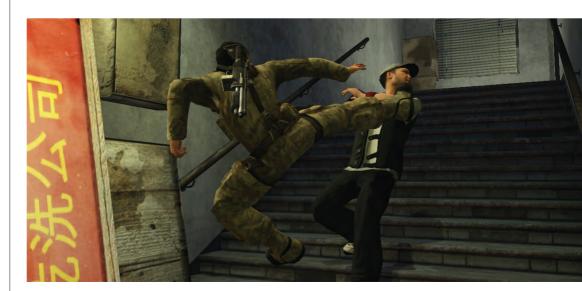
#### Tools of the trade

Drawing from its RPG roots, Alpha Protocol gives players the choice of four different classes (Soldier, Field Agent, Tech Specialist or Freelancer) as determined by your character's background and why he was drafted into the organisation. For an extra challenge, you can also choose Recruit, or once you've finished the game once at that level, Veteran. These classes determine a few things, such as dialogue options, but mostly exist to give you a basic structure around which you assign your character's skill points, called AP.

Skills include weapon specialisations, like pistols and shotguns, as well as stealth, toughness, technical aptitude and martial arts. As you spend AP on increasing your skill points, which can be done whenever you level up, you'll unlock new passive and active abilities that will help you in battle. SMG specialisation, for example, gives you an ability that temporarily allows you to continue firing without the need to reload, whereas spending points in the pistol field allows you to enter a slow-motion mode and pick your targets with precision. Between the nine skills, there are 12 active abilities, and a load of passive abilities, the combination of which should make for a decently-customisable experience based on your preferred playing style.

During missions, players will find a number of weapons, as well as upgrades and modifications for their weapons and armour that allow even further character customisation. These weapons and upgrades can also be purchased from the black market (as the US government cannot in any way be associated with sending heavily-armed soldiers into poor, sandy countries), and range from silencers to improved stocks and firing mechanisms to digital camouflage for your armour. However, most of these upgrades have a trade-off; while stashing 40 pounds worth of ceramic plating into your jacket pockets is a great way to keep the bullets away, it limits the amount of ammunition you can carry into each mission, as well as causing you to create more noise while desperately trying to sneak past the angry terrorist with a heavy machine gun.

"Players will have to keep out of sight and earshot of enemy soldiers while performing silent takedowns and engaging in any one of the three microgames to hack terminals and alarms."



you're speaking, which makes it important to figure out soon how each NPC will react to your various quips and jabs.

As a highly trained operative, Mike will have to use a variety of skills and tools to get through each mission with his skin as intact as possible. Players can use stealth to sneak around, go in guns-blazing, or use various gadgets and traps to get the job done. The missions are structured around a hub-and-spoke system, which means that they're chosen from a selection while in an AP-funded safe house in whichever district you're in (we've caught sight of Saudi Arabia, Rome, Moscow and Taipei during our time with the game). While in the safe house, Mike can purchase weapons, armour and other tools of the trade through the black-market website, and choose his loadout before embarking on the next

mission once he's had a chat to whichever handler is helping him out. As a rather nice touch, Mike gains a passive bonus for certain stats (such as reduced global cool down on active abilities) based on which handler is in use, and that bonus can be increased based on the reputation he holds with them - this insures that chatting and other dialogue at least has a meaningful, practical effect on gameplay.

Obsidian Entertainment is no stranger to RPGs, especially those that happily show off the action side of things, but this is their first excursion attempt at a modern-day game. If KotOR 2 and Neverwinter Nights 2 is anything to go by, Alpha Protocol is going to turn out to be a fine game that will either see mainstream success or, at the very least, a dedicated cult following.

**Geoff Burrows** 





"Blur's multiplayer mode is Call of Duty: Modern Carfare."

**\$IGN** "One of the best online experiences of the year."

GAMBSPOOT "Grown-up Mario Kart."







## **POWERED-UP RACING**

Go beyond just racing and enter the world of Blur. 4 player split-screen, 20 player competitive online and Team racing. Unlock unique Mods to customise and Power-up your Blur experience, stand out and become a legend.

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#### The Reviewers

Sometimes even the best trained soldiers get it wrong. Here we present the best of the best, the elite of the elite, the amazing of the... you get the idea.

#### Adam Liebman

AKA "Jugs" became somewhat famous (and notorious) during the war for tap dancing a little jig after each battle. 'Check for landmines, retard' is now written on his grave stone.



#### **Chris Bistline**

AKA "WTF" went down fast in his first urban gun battle. lust before he slipped he told the medic he was shot by an invisible guy that came from nowhere and didn't die when he shot him



#### **Dane Remendes**

AKA "Clan downer" goes crazy and kills everyone one and thing with similar names and clothing in any hattle Just can't stand similar looking groups of people. colours, etc. in any situation.



#### **Geoff Burrows**

AKA "Tit Flats" grew an impressive Mohawk on his five-year tour. He loved that thing, played with it, styled it and even stroked it to sleep. Too bad he stuck his head up during a napalm strike



war to kill more of his own than the enemy.

#### Miktar Dracon

AKA "Clydesdale" spent the first half of the war looking for some horse that reportedly dropped coloured dung. The last half was spent as the mascot in a giant penguin suit.



#### Neo Sibeko

AKA "Dead Rain" wore out the "enter" button on his keyboard for authorising 'excessive force'. Always wanted to command a nuclear missile silo but the army was too nervous.



#### Tarryn van der Byl

AKA "meat bomb" parachute battalion reconnaissance expert. You know she's around because enemy stuff is always exploding. Kept shortening the fuse on each job for a 'challenge.'



#### **Walt Pretorius**

AKA "Slugs" this army chef extraordinaire was in charge of all officer meals. If only they worked him so hard in training. 20% of all his 'heavily spiced' dishes came out the back of animals.



## Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

Vital Info: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

The Review: These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

Box Outs: More good stuff. Just in a box.



Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

Game Name: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

THE SCORE

Screenshots and Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart

Award: See below

#### The Score Box

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

**DRM:** Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

**Online Services:** Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

Plus/Minus: What we liked and didn't like, in convenient bullet-point format

Bottom Line: Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

#### for details Score: Further simplifying the bottom line to a Games for Windows LIVE number out of 100 + Enthralling setting - Doesn't change much + Improved combat system + Riveting story >Bottom Line Our second trip to Rapture is every bit as captivating as the first.



#### **Editor's Choice Award**

If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every



#### **Must Play Award**

Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.



#### Pony Award

This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the worst garbage.

## Quick Hits





#### **PLAIN SIGHT**

Plain Sight is a strange little game. Cool, but strange. It's a multiplayer game with a very pure focus – much like Quake III Arena is. Except that you play as a bloodthirsty robot wielding a katana in levels filled with bloodthirsty robots wielding katanas. The objective of your average Plain Sight Deathmatch is simple - you kill enemies, which will earn you energy, but won't actually score you any points. To score points, you have to know when to suicide and detonate your little robot buddy, which will take all the energy you've stored and add it to your total score (it'll also cause a big boom that'll kill nearby enemies and multiply your score). You get bigger and faster as you gain energy, but if you're killed, any energy you have stored will be transferred to your mechanical murderer. So you've basically got to know when to bank, or when to fight on for more energy. Aside from Deathmatch, there's Team Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Lighten Up (the biggest single detonation/suicide wins the game) and Ninja! Ninja! Botzilla! (which is like Mutant – there's one giant robot that everyone else on the map picks on). Your robot can also be upgraded to run faster, have a shield and such. Each level in the game features multiple gravitational forces, which means that every time you jump or dash you run the risk of becoming ridiculously disoriented, but you may also break any locks (you hold the left-mouse button to lock onto enemies - releasing the button will send you hurtling towards the robot you're locked on to) that your enemies have on you in the process by using the constantly changing gravity to slingshot your way around the varied, interestingly designed levels. Each robot on the level leaves a trail of light (the colour and intensity of the trail alters depending on their amount of stored energy/team colour), resulting in a psychedelic mess of vibrant colours trailing all over each level. It's a mesmerizingly pretty game that, despite its simplicity, is actually a load of fun to play with friends. We don't think it's the type of game people will be playing for years to come, but it's only \$9.99 on Steam and the download weighs in at just over 190MB. Try it – it's amusing.

**Bottom line:** Plain Sight offers enjoyable multiplayer for only \$9.99. It's simple, but entertaining fun. It's also got robots.

#### Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.

NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

#### **ALAN WAKE**



#### SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION



#### **SUPREME COMMANDER 2**



#### **METRO 2033**



#### THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM



#### **IRON MAN 2: THE VIDEOGAME**











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Galactica
The Plan
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## **Alan Wake**

The darkness wears her face

**GENRE** > Action/Horror

**360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

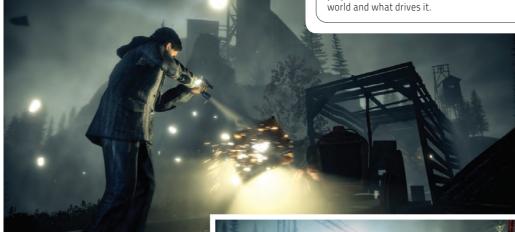
**T'S BEEN ALMOST FIVE** years since *Alan* Wake was first announced at E3. While it may have been a little premature to show off the game then, and many thought that we were dealing with another Duke Nukem Forever situation when it still hadn't rolled out years later, all this waiting and doubt has finally paid off. Alan Wake is here; you can buy it right now, and it's fantastic.

You play as bestselling thriller author Alan Wake. After the release of his latest book over two years prior, the media frenzy that followed and his subsequent marital turmoil, Alan has been unable to write a decent word. The couple need a holiday; a way for Alan to relax and recharge his creative batteries. A nice, relaxing, pokey, country town like Bright Falls looks the business, so bookings are made, flights are flown and the couple prepares for some serious unwinding for a while. But that would make for a boring game, so the developers instead decided to craft a cunning and interesting story that's fed to the player in dribs and drabs. Quite soon into the game, it becomes clear that Bright Falls has a dark secret, and when Alan's wife takes an unexpected long walk off a short balcony and plunges into the water far below, shortly after the two had a heated argument about his writing, he realises that there's more to saving her than simply jumping in for a swim.

Alan Wake has a strange, almost unsettling pace to it that enhances the atmosphere of mystery incredibly well. As the player, you truly feel like you're Alan Wake, stuck in a nightmare world and utterly confused. While this is par for the

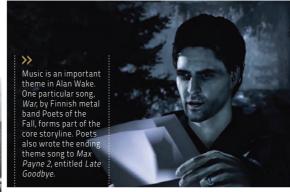
#### Follow the light

The Dark Presence cannot exist in the light, so that naturally becomes your biggest asset in the game. Whether you're playing like a gung-ho soldier or panicky schoolgirl (which you'll have to shift between throughout the game), light is your only true salvation. Each objective, which is made blatantly obvious through an ever-present HUD (and frankly, doesn't do much for the immersion), is also literally highlighted by a pool of light. At all times, if you ever feel lost, just follow the light and you know you'll be safe there. Streetlamps are checkpoints, but some of them need nearby generators to be activated through a nerve-wracking QTE. A few buildings have electricity, resilient against the Dark Presence, and are called Save Havens. There, you'll usually find ammo, weapons, lighting equipment and TVs or radios that provide some highly entertaining but pertinent bits of info. Watching and listening to the shows is entirely optional and unnecessary, but they form part of the game's surprisingly quirky nature that gives it a distinct feeling, one that increases steadily as you play on and uncover more of Wake's dark





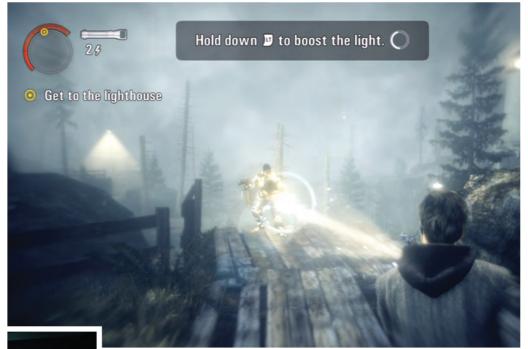






#### Light of my life

Flashlights might get the job done when there are only one or two Taken looking to hack off your head with a shovel, but when packs of them decide to try their luck, you need something more powerful. Flares only last a few seconds, but the brief reprieve they give from the onslaught can be invaluable, giving your flashlight and health a moment to recharge and creating a bit of breathing room around Wake while you can suss out the situation. Flashbangs are close to the best things in the game, with the ability to instantly vaporise almost any nearby Taken or Poltergeists in one shot. It's the humble flare gun, which to be honest just doesn't make it into enough games these days, that really takes the cake. The rocket launchers of Alan Wake, flare guns are fairly uncommon in the game and their ammo almost as tough to find, but when you're being attacked by a horde of Taken, this is the perfect weapon. Not only will it destroy pretty much anything it hits, but it also leaves behind a few seconds of safety-bestowing light.



course in an action-horror, the merit of this achievement is made clear when it turns out that everything going on around Wake is his doing. He wrote the story that brought chaos to his life, but has no memory of doing so. It's up to him to figure out what the hell is going on, who can be trusted, who needs to be filled with bullets and how he can solve this massive riddle.

As one may expect, uncovering the mystery isn't as simple as finding a couple of clues. Alan Wake will have to fend off the ever-increasing Dark Presence if he plans to save the day, and this Presence manifests in a number of ways. The most common method used is to possess living people. These weak-willed humans have typically lived in Bright Falls for a long time, and are susceptible to its control. The result of this

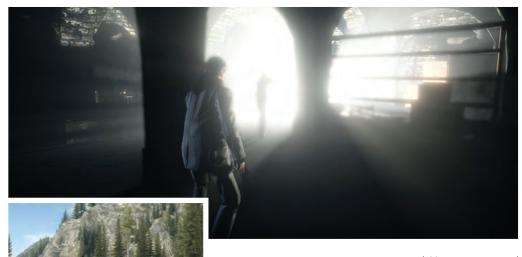
possession is what one would typically call zombies, but these guys are of the axe-wielding, moving-way-too-fast-tobe-undead variant, and need more than a couple of buckshot to bring down. Every one of these Taken essentially has two layers of hitpoints: the Darkness and their actual life-force. To kill them, you'll first need to destroy the Dark Presence inside and around them; only then can you dispatch them for good with conventional weapons like pistols or shotguns. This is where the fantastic flashlight mechanic comes into play.

During the night, it's difficult to see anything, so Wake has his trusty flashlight (or later, camping lantern and other improved versions) with him for most of the time to provide illumination and help him not stumble into anything sharp or bitey while

#### Hide and Seek

Exploration in Alan Wake is important for anyone who hopes to stay alive to see the next sunrise. Throughout the game world you'll find hidden caches of weapons and ammo, laid out by the same mysterious person who leaves hidden messages and clues only visible with light. While the game is entirely linear, offering no choice in what you get to do next, the environments that you're given to get from one objective to the next are usually quite expansive, and almost always have something hidden in a back alley, burned-out barn or other remote area, although that something is a Taken as often as it's a pack of batteries.

When you're not spending time trying to survive, you'll find a number of pages from the mysterious manuscript that Wake unwittingly wrote. As you collect manuscript pages, you'll reveal subtleties in the story you'd probably otherwise miss, and many of the pages describe events that haven't occurred yet. Needless to say, this makes for a unnerving experience; when you read "and then the birds surrounded the house," and you haven't encountered any birds yet, you spend the next half an hour of the game panicking every time you hear a squawk in the distance.



traipsing through the forest in the middle of the night. That flashlight also acts as a weapon, burning away the Dark Presence on any Taken, blinding them (and keeping them at bay), or occasionally destroying parts of the game environment that are consumed by the Dark Presence. Additionally, at the expense of battery power (which is otherwise unlimited), Wake can temporarily increase the power of his flashlight to deal with his enemies quicker. Thankfully, you'll usually find plenty of batteries lying around the game world, but running close to empty is a nonetheless terrifying occurrence.

For a game that starts out as a creepy, intimidating and downright bizarre romp through the mind of a crazy man, Alan Wake ends up feeling decidedly like an arcade game towards the end. It'd be a shame to explain why, exactly, this happens, but the change in tempo as Wake digs deeper into the mystery of Bright Falls fits the story perfectly. There are sequences in the game that one wouldn't expect in a psychological thriller, but this isn't Silent Hill. There are certainly parts of Alan Wake that feel like it, but the majority of the game plays more like Resident Evil 4 or 5 than anything else, and the presentation often feels like Remedy's other big game, Max Payne. There are even sequences in the game that play out like Left 4 Dead's famous Crescendo Events, in which Wake must defend a certain area from a seemingly-endless torrent of Taken. All of these aspects, combined with the absence of that clinical, inhumane taste that many AAA titles leave in one's mouth, come together to deliver an action-horror game that has plenty of heart. Whether you're looking for a thriller with action bits or an action game with a brain-twisting storyline, Alan Wake will have something to offer you. NAG **Geoff Burrows** 



The various Taken will wield weapons based on their previous lives, much like the Uruboros in Resident Evil 5. Farmers will chase after you with scythes and hoes, miners try to take your eyes out with pickaxes, and a few of the large, terrifying lumberjacks will come at you with chainsaws.





#### THE SCORE











#### >Plus

- + Fantastic story
- + Excellent visuals
- + Awesome combat

#### >MINUS A bit short

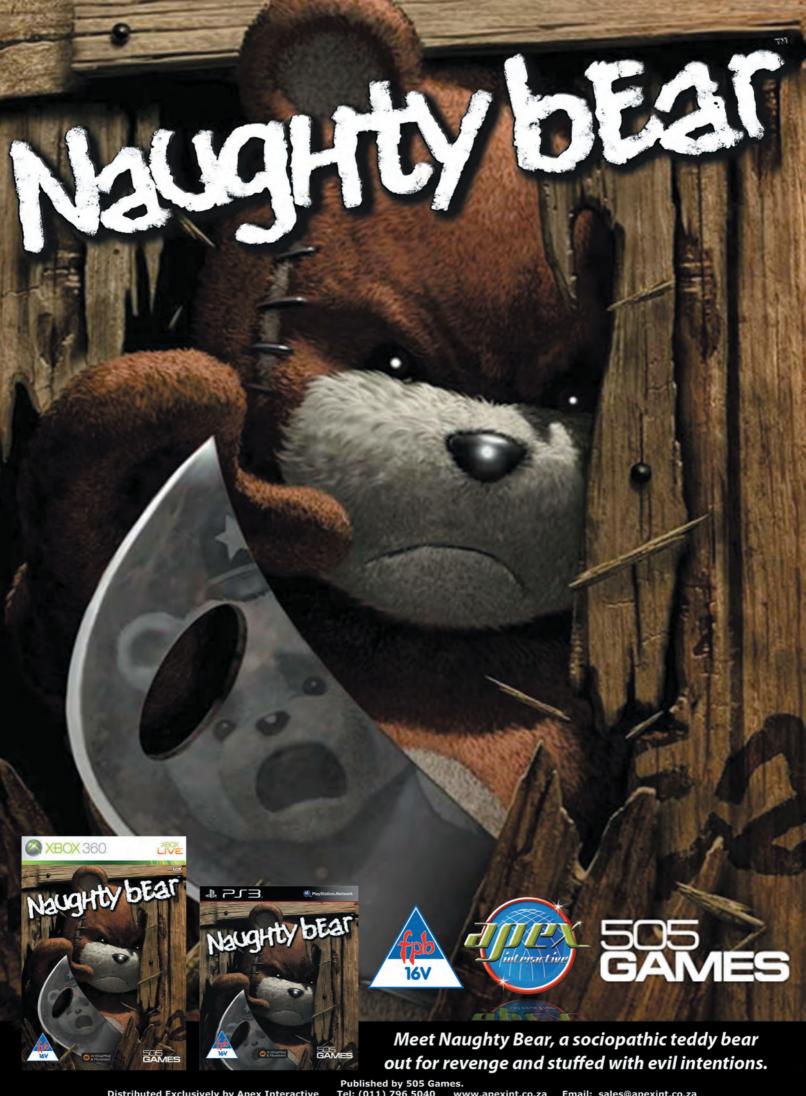
- Unnecessary HUD

#### >Bottom Line

The best combination of spooky action you'll find for a while. Definitely worth the wait.



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War never changes

**GENRE** > First-person shooter

**360 PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

WHEN THE NUCLEAR APOCALYPSE hits your neighbourhood, where are you going to hide? The reality is that we probably don't have any massive, government-funded vaults or handy orbital platforms to escape to. Nope, the majority of us poor schlubs will either be obliterated in the blast, boiled to death in the fallout or will suffocate in the nuclear winter that follows. Thankfully, beneath Moscow lies a vast network of railways that is an almost perfect hiding place for the surviving population. It's in those tunnels that Metro 2033 takes place.

You take on the role of 20-year-old would-be adventurer Artyom, and inhabitant of Exhibition Station from the day of his birth. When Exhibition is attacked by foul and mutated creatures, the leaders choose you as the emissary of hope, to travel to the largest, most powerful station in the Metro, Polis, and bring back whatever help you can. What seems like a relatively simple task soon becomes something much more; outside of the relative safety of the stations lies a decaying maze of tunnels, filled with bandits, radiation anomalies and, of course, lots of mutated things that want to eat your face off.

Everything in the dark tunnels of *Metro* 2033 drips with atmosphere. The stations, as packed as they are with people, feel hot and stuffy, and noise pollution is an obvious factor in these people's lives. In contrast, the untamed tunnels outside of the stations are dead quiet and expectedly eerie as result. A couple of times you also visit the surface, to take in the grey, rolling clouds and dirty, snow-covered city with its rickety

#### Weapons of the new war

With 99% of manufacturing in the postapocalyptic future destroyed, mankind has turned to garage-style engineering to keep itself armed. As a result, some of the weapons in *Metro* are something quite different to the FPS norm. Pneumatic arrow launchers make for great sniper rifles due to their almost silent operation, a particular SMG uses a magazine more reminiscent of a type-writer mechanism, and my personal favourite, the combat shotgun, has a giant knife welded onto the front end to make for some very satisfying melee combat. In addition, all the weapons come in a few different versions, such as including an upgraded stock or silencer.

buildings and own collection of dangers. During certain parts of the game, and while you're on the surface, the world's poisonous atmosphere requires that you wear your gas mask at all times or suffocate. While you have your mask on, you'll need to keep it topped up with fresh filters; without them, your breathing becomes difficult, and the loud, obnoxious sucking noise your character makes while trying to pull in the last drops of air through the filter is sure to creep you out. Between the lighting and audio, you'll be hard-pressed to find many other games that make you feel this uncomfortable.

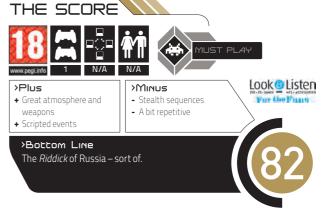
Progress through *Metro* is almost entirely linear, which is a bit of a pity given its setting. However, the scripting is exciting and keeps things interesting most of the way through, and especially towards the end. The only times it really disappoints is

during the stealth sections, as the Al shifts rapidly between brain-dead and impossibly cunning at the drop of a hat. It's easier just to run and gun through most of these

Despite a few shortcomings, Metro 2033 is one of the finest games we've seen from a Russian developer in a while. If you can get through a couple of irritating bits, you're certain to be rewarded with an interesting world, fun and challenging gameplay, and plenty of frights. NAG

sections, unfortunately.

#### **Geoff Burrows**









#### The ACU

The Armoured Command Unit is your flagship unit. This metal dude can construct buildings faster than engineers, repair damaged units, reclaim resources and packs a decent punch in a fight (assuming you've spent some Research Points upgrading his stats). One of the multiplayer game modes, Assassination, requires that you destroy the enemy ACU in order to win. The other modes don't put so much pressure on you to keep your ACU alive but you'll certainly feel the difference if your ACU leaves the battlefield in its trademark nuclear fashion. There's a whole research tree dedicated to the ACU, which should be an indication of this unit's importance.



## **Supreme Commander 2**

With robot dinosaurs. ROBOT \*\*\*\*ING DINOSAURS!

**GENRE** > Real-Time Strategy

PS2 PSP **360** PS3 WII

FEEL COMPELLED TO SCORE Supreme Commander 2 well over the 100-percent limit, but apparently I'm not allowed to do that. The reason for my wanting to score it so high is because of a beautiful, obviously completely intelligent combination of two things: robots and dinosaurs. Robots. Dinosaurs. You put those two things together, and you've got awesome sauce on legs with robotic dangly bits. Robot dinosaurs exist in SC2 (not to be confused with that other SC2), and that should automatically make this the greatest game on the planet. They could've just shoved regular dinosaurs in there, and I probably would've given the game 98. That wouldn't be fair though, because, even though SC2 is a good game, it's trapped in a strange niche in the RTS world that not everyone will appreciate.

The original Supreme Commander also fitted into its own nice little spot within the magical land of the RTS when it was released for the PC back in 2007. Its slow pace, massive units (which took forever to build if you didn't manually speed up their production using engineers), humongous

battlefields, crazy population cap and innovative ideas left the RTS community conflicted, with many outright hating it and others feeling complete indifference towards it (those are the guys who went back to playing Command & Conquer 3 at the time) while a small, very dedicated bunch ended up loving the game more than they love their mothers. It's that final group that's going to be the most annoyed by SC2's changes to the method of the original. The rest of you will probably just continue to be indifferent while a new group of SC2-loving gamers will hopefully form.

The game's single-player campaign isn't engaging at all. There's some junk going on about a president being assassinated that shatters the already shaky truce between the Cybran Nation, the UEF (United Earth Federation) and the Illuminate (formerly the Aeon Illuminate). The story is never delivered in entertaining fashion – stuff just sort of happens, and if you play the campaign, you'll likely find yourself just blindly, soullessly trudging through the 21 missions (seven for each faction, each of which puts you in control of a different character and his ACU) on offer without anything really compelling you to continue. The voice acting is annoyingly bad and noticeably forced; not from all the characters, but from most







#### Changes and stuff

This is where fans of the original are going to be annoyed by SC2, because many changes have been made to speed up the pace and give the game more mainstream appeal. The three tech tiers are gone and have been replaced with a tech tree that's been divided into different categories (like land, structure and naval). Instead of having to build engineers from three tech trees to get to the high-tech toys, you now build Research Stations and blow up enemies to generate a third resource in the form of Research Points (Mass and Power are the other resources). Assigning points to different categories can do anything from adding weaponry to existing units, unlocking

new experimental units and unlocking advanced structures, to increasing your rate of Mass/Power income and increasing the speed of your air units. Resources now have to be paid up front before production can take place on new units and structures, and the number of experimental units on offer has been increased while their cost and construction time have been decreased. The total number of units and buildings available in the game has been decreased. Basically, SC2 is less complicated (which you can read as dumbed down, if you're so inclined), but is faster paced, with games that end much quicker and make for interesting tech-tree experimentation.



of them. The missions are almost all boring slogs through different environments (most of which are quite nice to look at), and the only excitement comes from very brief segments where the game will throw an interesting scenario, limitation or objective at you. Even the story itself, which tries to evoke some emotion from the player using the conflicted characters within, only comes across as contrived and boring throughout. If you're planning on buying SC2, don't buy it for the single player – that's all I'm saying.

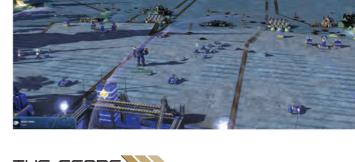
The multiplayer, on the other hand, is awesome and where you'll get the most enjoyment out of the game. The faster pace of the game means that there's no way to research everything on the tech tree before the game is over (unless you've come to an agreement with your opponent to take things slow), so your research choices and when you choose to apply them has a huge impact on the game. There's something for everyone though: by researching within the structure tech tree, for example, a turtler can win the game without ever fielding any units and simply building defensive turrets, nuclear silos and long-range artillery. The armies (and some of the units they're comprised of) are still massive, and the conflicts in SC2 can get crazy very quickly. Some features like transport ferrying and engineer-/ACU-assisted unit

construction make a return, as does the incredible level of zoom that lets you see the entire battlefield by simply zooming out.

It's unclear at the moment how popular this game will be, or how much of a following it'll attract. It's trapped somewhere between the very fast pace of Command & Conquer 4 and the brutal, pinpoint precision of StarCraft II, and the game is more about experimentation than precise tactics and thousands of actions per minute. It's sort of like a sandbox: each game you play encourages you to experiment with your tactics and research strategies to try and get the upper hand. One thing you'll probably appreciate is that the game is not the system hog that its predecessor was, and mid-range machines shouldn't have a problem running the game.

Supreme Commander 2's future in the RTS world may be unclear right now, but as it stands, it's definitely a fun, engaging RTS. Well, the multiplayer is at least. Fans of the first will probably feel nothing but negativity towards the game's faster pace and altered mechanics, but it's got robot \*\*\*ing dinosaurs that fire flamethrowers and missiles. I'm sure you can put up with the changes when there are robot dinosaurs involved. NAG

**Dane Remendes** 





Steam

#### >Plus

- + Decent strategic depth
- + Fun multiplayer
- + Robot dinosaurs

#### >Minus

- Lousy single player
- Not quite Supreme Commande
- Gigantic initial game update

#### >Bottom Line

There's a good chance that Supreme Commander 2 will piss off fans of the original with the changes it's made, but it's still a good game.

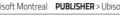


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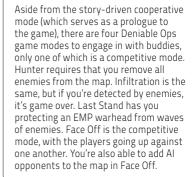


















**Splinter Cell: Conviction** 

Who needs stealth anyway?

**GENRE** > Third-Person Action/Stealth **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**O**KAY, SO SPLINTER CELL: Conviction isn't truly Splinter Cell anymore. It's an all-new beast, with simplified stealth elements giving way to more explosive action without sacrificing the series' core ideology. Sam Fisher is one angry bearded man in Conviction, out to uncover the truth behind the death of his daughter, Sarah. He's gone rogue and left his former handlers at Third Echelon, who are now involved in some massive, terrible conspiracy that threatens babies and small children everywhere. Along the way, you'll come across some familiar faces, punch many, many people in the face (when you're not busy shooting them in the crotch) and learn the cool, hip names of many cool, hip organisations, like Black Arrow.

Mr. Fisher's newfound anger makes room for some very intense reinvented gameplay. Not having anyone to hold his leash, Sam lets all his pent-up aggression out on the semi-innocent bad guys in Conviction, and we almost feel bad for them. Sam has never been this outright deadly - he's like some sick, twisted cross between Altair, Ezio, Jason Bourne and James Bond. An agile, tough and scorned man, Sam is able to dispose of enemies in new and brutal ways. He makes it look easy, too. Clambering up the sides of buildings, pulling enemies out of open windows to send them crashing to the ground below and executing handto-hand kills – you'll be doing all of this in Conviction. Some familiar gadgets make a return in Conviction, like the sticky camera (useful for scouting and, once done with that, detonating them and taking out nearby enemies), while some new ones (like







the portable EMP – great for knocking out light sources and stunning enemies) add to the style of it all. Mark & Execute and Last Known Position are new features that solidify Sam's more hands-on approach. Mark & Execute allows you to quickly take out multiple enemies that you've marked beforehand by simply pressing Y (you'll be able to mark more enemies as you progress through the game and upgrade weapons). You gain the ability to Mark & Execute by performing melee kills. Last Known Position is a visual representation of using your enemy's awareness against them. If an enemy spots you, your silhouette will mark the location you were in when the enemy detected you, after which you can disappear



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#### Mini Co-Op Review Extravaganza

Since the days of Double Dragon, beating up virtual bad guys with a buddy has been a great way to spend an afternoon. Co-op play is something that I've always enjoyed in games, and when two copies of Splinter Cell arrived in the office, it became obvious that I'd need to muscle in on Dane's review space to throw in my 2 cents of this portion of the game. So here goes.

The co-op sees you take on the roles of secret agents Archer and Kestrel as they try to take down some sort of Russian terrorist plot. There's a story there, but to be honest we were so overwhelmed by the concept of double-tea bagging our fallen enemies that it went mostly over our heads. We do know that the co-op story ties into the main storyline, at least.

The gameplay in co-op is fantastic, and a bit of friendly competition for the most headshots or melee takedowns tends to pick up the pace a little faster than how one would play the single player mode. The result (at

least, when we played) is an action-packed series of missions that take everything from the main campaign's gameplay mechanics and adds a little on top. When one of the duo goes down to enemy fire, he'll lie there waiting for resuscitation from his buddy, but he can also pop his head up to take down nearby enemies at the risk of dying permanently (and causing the mission to fail) if he's not careful. Enemies that try to get clever and take the players in a chokehold could soon find themselves on the receiving end of a bullet; a captured player can distract the enemy to create a moment of opportunity for his buddy to take care of business.

If none of the above appeals to you, then just read this: tag-team interrogation. It's not quite as fancy as your imagination might conjure, but you can slam a dude's head into a table while your buddy teabags him. This is unbeatable in modern gaming.

Geoff Burrows











into the shadows while they continue to search near and shoot bullets at your Last Known Position, allowing you to flank them and gain a tactical advantage, which is a cool way to make being spotted by enemies less of a hindrance and more of an opportunity.

The game is presented with incredible flair: brilliant voice acting and visual panache make this game feel, look and sound polished and slick. Text and video are superimposed onto the game world, constantly reminding you of your objectives, Sam's state of mind and exactly what he's thinking every step of the way. Every once in a while throughout the game, an interrogation sequence will pop up lets you use environmental objects (like urinals and television sets) to loosen key characters' tongues. These sequences are a bit superfluous, but they're enjoyable and executed in such a way as to add to the game's already great atmosphere. The single-player story will keep you interested throughout, but it's over much too quickly. It'll take you approximately five to six hours to complete the campaign, but the short ride is fantastic. It helps that the Deniable Ops modes make for awesome fun, and that the cooperative story mode will get you about six hours worth of play time.

Fans of the series should be warned that Conviction doesn't offer the same hardcore stealth elements that previous titles in the series (like Chaos Theory) did. The heavier focus on action and slimming of the stealthy side of Splinter Cell is sure to drive many gamers crazy with hatred, but we love it. It's like being Jason Bourne with a beard. NAG

**Dane Remendes** 













#### >Plus

- + Slick, polished and shiny
- + Awesome co-op and story
- Good mix of stealth/action

#### >MINUS

Short single player



#### >Bottom Line

It's not Splinter Cell the way we know it, but phenomenal presentation and great single-player/ cooperative gaming make for happy fun times



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## **2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa**

Vuvuzela included

**GENRE** > Sports

**360 PS3 WII** PS2

PSP

THE SIGNS ARE GROWING every day. There THE SIGNS ARE GROWING EVERY Gay.

are little flags all over the place, displaying the melting-pot of nationalities that make up our cosmopolitan population. There are vuvuzelas braying in neighbourhoods that they have never been heard in before And there is a palpable feeling in the air, an electricity, that is steadily growing as we South Africans approach the first kick off of the biggest sporting event our country has ever seen. Maybe not the most significant – the '94 Rugby World Cup victory will still hold that position for many reasons - but certainly the biggest.

Personally, I can't wait 'til it's over. For one thing, a vuvuzela being repeatedly blown up and down the street at three in the morning is enough to incite homicidal rage in even the most passive person. And then there's the chaos that a flood of foreign visitors will bring, despite the fact that estimates (at the time of writing) have the expected numbers at less than half of the hoped-for figure. It will be an exciting time for South Africa, but also a trying one.

Me, I prefer to get my football fix by way of virtual methods. When FIFA 10 came out last year, I was happy as a pig in thoroughly digested matter, and the announcement of 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa got me even deeper in.

As with most World Cup versions of the popular FIFA video game franchise, this is really little more than a tweaking and skinning of the previous game. However, the developers have kept things fresh by adding a few improvements and tweaks to the game.

The most obvious tweaks happened in the



graphics department. With the majority of players (from the big teams, at least) looking spot on, and new pitch textures, the game looks great. This extends into the party atmosphere of the title as well, with lots of special effects to wow players

The sound is pretty good too, with solid commentary often extolling the virtues of the host nation, as well as bleating vuvuzelas (which can, mercifully, be turned off) sounding from the crowd.

Some game dynamics have been tweaked, too, including a new penalty system that takes pressure into account.

This is not a new game, and it will most certainly be trumped by FIFA 11 later this year. But it is a game that is worth having, for a few reasons. The improvements may not be massive, but they are enough to make a difference. And, of course, there is the fact that this game commemorates the South African FIFA World Cup... a reason for any semi-patriotic video gamer to have it. It serves as a solid memento and enjoyable video game celebration of the event. NAG

**Walt Pretorius** 



#### THE SCORE











#### >Plus

- + Improved graphics
- + Some dynamic tweaks

#### >MINI IS

- Not really new
- Vuvuzelas

#### >Bottom Line

It's a great memento for fans of the franchise, but it's not revolutionary.



Look@Listen

















## The Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom

More adorable than a baby stormtrooper

**GENRE** > Real-Time Strategy/Management 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP

THE SETTLERS SERIES HAS always been ridiculously addictive to those who take a liking to its slower pace, rich economic system, endearing visuals and unique take on real-time strategy. The Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom is no different: it's definitely not for everyone, but fans of the series will be pleased with this latest in the franchise and the changes it brings to the game

The game takes place in the kingdom of Tandria, and the single-player campaign puts you in control of a character named Princess Zoé, who is out to reclaim Tandria from the hands of the corrupt and vile buttholes currently in charge of ruling it. This involves conquering the kingdom, one sector at a time. It's a decent campaign and serves as a good tutorial for the game, but it's pretty generic. For those who don't know, The Settlers is a cross between RTS and management games that is all about putting together an attractive settlement to attract people, who you'll then put to work gathering resources, producing goods, researching technologies, trading merchandise and fighting bad dudes. Expanding your territory to claim the different resources available in each sector of each map is an important part of the game, and the economy is very diverse and uniquely complex (compared to other RTSes) with a number of different resources to gather and goods to produce. Every part of the economy is tied to another part in some way - producing tools, for example, is essential to keep your workers working. Tools require wood and iron to produce, which requires woodcutters, iron miners and iron smelters to gather the correct resources. Construction has been altered for this new title: no longer are there millions of different buildings to construct, but instead there are fewer primary buildings that can have up to three work yards attached to them. A standard residence, for example, can have a







bakery attached to it so that the building both provides living space and produces food. You don't have to provide food for most of your settlers (aside from work yards attached to noble residences – basic food is mandatory for these to function), but giving them food will make them work harder. The somewhat complex economy might be intimidating to newcomers, but fans will immediately feel at home here. Special buildings, like export offices (required to initiate trade), constructors (for constructing buildings) and churches (technology research is done by the inhabitants of the church) can be unlocked by spending Prestige Points, which you'll accumulate as you play and fulfil certain requirements

. Victory in *The Settlers 7* is achieved by accruing Victory Points. This is done by completing different quests (like scratching a dragon's back; no, we're not kidding) and meeting certain conditions on each of the game's maps (like having more soldiers than your opponent). Each game, you'll have to make the choice to either use trade, technology or pure military might to defeat your opponent, which all ties into the Victory Point system. Get enough Victory Points and a timer will start counting down. Hold onto those Victory Points before the time runs out and you win. When that timer pops up it can lead to some very intense situations as players struggle to either stop the timer or keep it ticking away.

It's a very entertaining game, provided you enjoy the type of play dynamic that it has to offer. The visuals are adorably impressive (as

they usually are in Settlers titles), and the game is presented almost flawlessly. There's even Facebook and other online services integrated into the game, so that in-game achievements can be shared with the world to show them just how awesome and socially acceptable you are. Aside from some minor niggles, the biggest problem we have with the game has nothing to do with the game itself: instead, it's the fact that Ubisoft's ludicrously anal DRM could potentially ruin the experience for everyone. If you don't mind putting up with the copy protection and you're a fan of the series, The Settlers 7 is sure to provide some good times. NAG

**Dane Remendes** 

#### THE SCORE

















- + Impressive visuals
- + Solid gameplay mechanics

#### Charming presentation

The DRM is lame

- Generic single-player campaign



It's not without its problems, but the seventh Settlers game is an addictive, charming and enjoyable title.



Look@Listen



**DEVELOPER** > Rocksteady Studios **PUBLISHER** > Eidos Interactive / Square Enix **DISTRIBUTOR** > Nu Metro Interactive **WEB** > www.batmanarkhamasylum.com



## **Batman: Arkham Asylum**

#### - Game of the Year Edition

The Caped Crusader gets a new dimension to play in

**GENRE** > Action

**360 PS3** WII PS2

**B**ATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM IS, with very little doubt, the caped crusader's finest videogame appearance to date. Not only that, but most gamers will agree that it's one of the best superhero titles ever released. Everything from the engaging story to the eerily gritty recreation of the Asylum itself has received almost universal praise, and with good reason. Now, as fans eagerly await the release of a sequel, Eidos have rereleased Arkham Asylum in "Game of the Year" guise, and though it offers little for seasoned Batman veterans, it's certainly the definitive edition of this breathtaking game.

Although the main game remains unchanged from last year's release (i.e. the compelling story, strong voice acting, engrossing combat and satisfying stealth components are all present) - the GOTY edition offers a few extras however. It includes six challenge maps, originally available as DLC for the original game. In addition, the game comes bundled with two pairs of 3D glasses. Sure, it's not the fancy kind of polarized 3D that they use in the cinemas, but the goofy looking cardboard ones with different coloured lenses. They do add an extra layer of depth to the game, and make the visuals feel just that little bit crisper. Don't expect to see Batarangs jumping out of your TV - the difference

is more subtle, but it's nonetheless an interesting feature to have available, and it's easily deactivated at will if you feel it's just too gimmicky.

For anyone who's mastered the original version of the game, the GOTY edition doesn't really offer anything new. For those who never got around to playing the game's first release, this is definitely the version to pick up – not only will it save you the effort of downloading all the additional bundled content, but the slightly gimmicky optional 3D mode makes an interesting addition to what is already a top-quality title. NAG

Adam Liebman





#### THE SCORE















- + As awesome as ever
- + With bonus content

- Not much for veterans

Look@Listen

Not much on offer for those who have played the original, but bonus content and the cool 3D mode make this the definitive edition for newcomers.

















**BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger** Arc System Works

**GENRE** > Fighting

**360 PS3** WII PS2 **PSP** 

**B**LAZBLUE IS A TITLE that will likely be known to only a few in this country, but that should not put you off because this is one of the best 2D fighters in recent history. In fact, you could go as far as to say it's amongst the best fighters ever.

BlazBlue was originally released in Japan (on the Taito Type X2) in 2008, but eventually made its way to home platforms and between then and now, it has undergone some changes and upgrades. Amongst the most significant changes is the addition of story mode, which is missing on the arcade machine. The general story revolves around the lead character, Ragna the Bloodedge and the Azure Grimoire power that he possesses. This power is supposedly capable of destroying the world; as such various factions and characters are seeking this power. All twelve characters in the game are in some way involved with Ragna and each one has a story to tell about their encounter with our protagonist.

The story mode in BlazBlue is unlike any other in a fighting game. While it offers the same game mechanics as the arcade battle, each encounter only has one round or "Rebel" as it's called. At the end of this round, the story either continues or the game ends. This unusual story telling works well most of the time as it drives you to complete the game to uncover the various tales each character has. This story is told very well in some parts and poorly in others. It switches between real voice acting and the player having to read. So you end up doing both even when characters are talking to each other.

The story behind *BlazBlue* is certainly





better than most, if not all, 2D fighters, but its presentation isn't necessarily so. However, it would be a shame to measure this game based on what was clearly an afterthought for the home version. This game comes into its own when playing arcade, or versus mode. The move set may be hard to get into, but once you get used to it, you can execute some impressive combos and amongst the most visually appealing Distortion attacks (think SDM's in the KOF series of Super Combos in Street Fighter) of any game out today.

The backgrounds are a gorgeous mix of some stunning 3D and detailed 2D sprites. The combination never ceases to amaze and in pure 2D fighters, there just isn't anything that looks this beautiful. The animation is butter smooth and the characters detailed in every frame. It's more like interacting with a high quality anime show rather than a game. The moves are outrageous, the speed dazzling and the in-game voice taunts are near perfect for each character. It would have been great to have the option of the original Japanese voice acting but the English dubs are acceptable except for a few places where they sound forced.

Stemming from the same creators of the Guilty Gear series, the play mechanics are

similar, but with far more depth. The sheer number of strategies available to each player is staggering and one can choose any number of playing styles, and this makes for the perfect game to play against other skilled fighting game fans. BlazBlue takes the best from several 2D fighters into one game that is superior to them all. In this day where traditional 2D fighting games are far and few in between, BlazBlue proves that there is still some life left in the genre. NAG

Neo Sibeko













#### >Plus

- + Beautiful graphics
- + Fighting system

#### >MINI IS

Small Roster



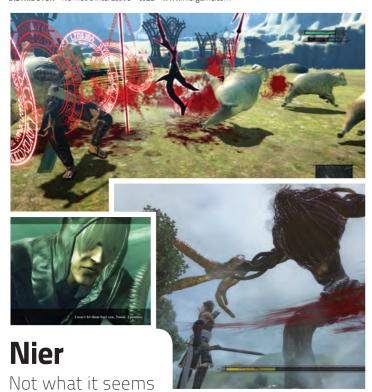
>Bottom Line

BlazBlue is Last Blade 2 meets Guilty Gear XX, better than both and proof that 2D fighters can still be relevant today.





**DEVELOPER** > Cavia Inc. **PUBLISHER** > Square Enix **DISTRIBUTOR** > Nu Metro Interactive **WEB** > www.niergame.com



**GENRE** > Action Adventure

360 PS3

**N** IER IS AN ACTION adventure game that has been heavily influenced by the JRPG genre. It tells the tale of a father who must find a cure for a terrible disease that threatens to kill his daughter. Fair enough. It is set 1,400 years in the future which would also be fair enough, except for the fact that mankind has somehow reverted to a medieval stage. They have libraries full of books about the technology of their predecessors, but they ride horses and hit each other with sticks – does not compute.

The slight implausibility of the plot aside, Nier has numerous faults. First off are the graphics. They feel rather dated, and the 'arty' use of side scrolling levels at certain times (generally in rooms when social interactions are needed) does nothing to elevate the sub-standard looks that Nier offers. The voice acting is not too bad, but the conversations within the game use it inconsistently. The player may find situations in which they

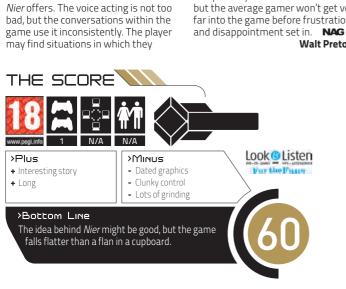
begin a conversation with voice acting, only to have it revert to text based interactions... and then back to voice. It's jarring and less than desirable.

Nier presents the player with what appears to be a free-roaming world, but then restricts them in a number of ways. It's not like GTA or Just Cause - the player won't be able to do their own thing. And the early levels feature more grinding than a back-street strip club. Additionally, the combat and magic controls are clunky, and the character customisation feels far too guided to engender any idea of in-game freedom.

As an experiment, Nier is a good idea, but the execution of the game lacks the flair and polish that is expected of titles these days. There will certainly be a base of fans that develops around this title - elevating it to a possibly undeserved cult status but the average gamer won't get very far into the game before frustration

**Walt Pretorius** 

VEW & PRE-PI





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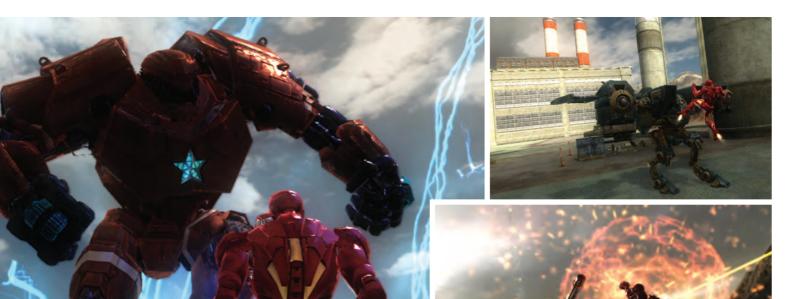
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## Iron Man 2: The Videogame

Fail, now in hotrod red

**GENRE** > Action

360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

YOU SHOULD WATCH IRON Man 2. It's a good movie. You shouldn't play Iron Man 2: The Videogame. It's not a good game. The game doesnt follow the plot of the movie, so you'd think this would have created an opportunity for the developers to craft their own unique storyline, to create something that stands as an accomplishment on its own - you know, like a game that's actually good and fun to play. Unfortunately, with the time constraints and all that wonderful stuff (like insurmountable pressure) that gets placed on movie-game developers, Iron Man 2 has come out the other end not looking too good. It's not terrible, but it's boring in every way. The environments, the combat, the visuals, the enemies, the flight (which is almost painfully slow) and pretty much the entire game: it all gets very boring very shortly after you hit the new-game button. To be honest, we don't really blame the developers, what with the rush that is placed on movie games to coincide with the release of their associated movies.

Don Cheadle and Samuel L. Jackson reprise their roles from the movie for *Iron* Man 2, but Robert Downey Jr., Scarlett Johansson, Gwyneth Paltrow and all the other actors from the movie are missing. The game features most of the cool stuff from the movie: you fly, you shoot Iron Man's repulsors at robots, you unleash War Machine's mini-gun, you punch things, you get shot, you wash, you rinse, you repeat. There's nothing fundamentally wrong with the gameplay, but there's nothing particularly exciting about it either.

The controls are decent, but there are



times when they can get finicky and, when combined with the totally rubbish camera, you may find yourself getting annoyed very quickly. Before each mission, you customise the load out of your chosen character (you can choose to play as either Iron Man or War Machine before each mission, but there's no cooperative mode for two players to tackle the game together) by assigning weaponry, ammunition types, close-combat styles and modular enhancements. New weaponry and tech needs to be researched by gathering field research data (which acts as currency) from each mission, which can then be spent to unlock new ammo types, augmentations and the like. This is the most fun part of the game, with the player able to customise the way they're going to tackle each mission – but even that gets quite tedious after a while. If you do well enough in each mission, you'll also unlock new Iron Man suits (like . Iron Man's Extremis armour) to use in missions, which is a nice extra for fans of the

It's not only that the game is boring, but it's also riddled with random bugs and graphical glitches. Texture pop-in is commonplace, and the game just looks



cheap. The audio is okay, but like the rest of the game, it's unremarkable. If you just saw the movie or you love the comic books, you've probably already gotten this game and been underwhelmed by it. It's got Iron Man in it and that's a redeeming factor, but after the initial, brief thrill of playing as the tinny hero, you're going to find yourself annoyed that you spent money on this game. NAG

**Dane Remendes** 

#### THE SCORE











#### >Plus

- + Iron Man's in it
- + It's not completely broken
- + Research system is functio

#### >Minus

- Bugs and graphical glitches
- Bland gameplay/environments
- Gets boring fast

>Bottom Line

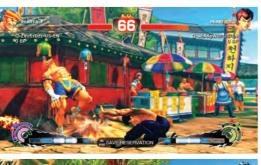
It's your typical movie/licensed game. Deal with it.



Look@Listen



**DEVELOPER** > Dimps / Capcom **PUBLISHER** > Capcom **DISTRIBUTOR** > Nu Metro Interactive **WEB** > www.streetfighter.com











The best fighter ever just got better!

**GENRE** > Fighting

360 PS3 WII

STREET FIGHTER IV WAS a great game when it was released last year and remains so today with a huge fan following. Until this update it was the best Street Fighter game ever released. Super Street Fighter IV, however, changes that and places itself as the greatest Street Fighter

game ever and probably the best 2D fighter as well.

With 10 new characters, the game is to Street Fighter IV what Super Street Fighter II Turbo was to the original Street Fighter 2. Classics like Dee Jay, T. Hawk and Fei Long make a welcome return, joined by others including Makoto from Street Fighter 3, Cody and Guy from the Alpha series or if you prefer the Final Fight. Ibuki, Dudley and others also return, updated, smoother, slicker and faster than before.

The game is much harder now, but as a result far more enjoyable. What is certain is, unlike the original game where you could go from start to end while engaging in a casual

conversation with a spectator, in this title you must pay attention and focus on the screen constantly. Not only is the game slightly faster, but the Al is much improved. The challenge makes it more rewarding than the previous game.

Newer net code and game modes allow for smoother online matches, and this should be even more popular than in the original game. This title is not just an expansion to the original but deserves to stand as an independent game. With new intro sequences, art and story line for each character you'll spend hours on end unlocking all the illustrations. Rewards are easier to come by this time, and bonus rounds like the barrel break and car bashing bonus stages from the old coin-operated arcade version of Street Fighter II make a return.

Hard as it may be, Super Street Fighter IV is in every way a better title than the original and stands as the best yet. NAG

Neo Sibeko

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THE SCORE















- + Large roster
- + Challenging
- + Bonus stages return

- Boss character still ridiculous



>Bottom Line

Dimps and Capcom have managed to improve on a near-perfect game. This is definitely the ultimate 2D fighter on any platform.













## Phantasmagoria

**B**Y 1995, MANY HAD considered the Golden Age of quest games to be at the end of its run. 3D was muscling in on the classic 2D sprites of the gaming world, and shooters were bringing the industry more into the mainstream than ever before. Determined to take a stab at the FMV adventure genre before her career ran out (which happened three years after Phantasmagoria's release, with the awful King's Quest 8), Roberta Williams designed Phantasmagoria and unleashed it on the world. It was met with mixed reactions: most gamers enjoyed its cheesy horror elements, but the presence of violent acts including rape and murder saw the game banned in Australia and other territories, and slapped with a sales-damaging

18-only age restriction everywhere else. Despite all of this, it still managed to top Sierra's sales charts for 1995

The story sees murder mystery novelist Adrienne Delaney and her photographer husband, Donald Gordon, move into a spooky yet affordable mansion previously owned by occult-dabbling magician Zoltan Ćarnovasch. No surprise, lots of evil things happen that see our heroine desperately try to piece together the mysteries of the house and not be murdered by all the rampant demonic forces present in the house

It's unfair to judge this game based on visuals, because it's from that awful period in game development where studios made gratuitous use of 3D without the level of fidelity we have today.



#### "Phantasmagoria not only looks terrible, it also manages to sound quite awful as well."







Phantasmagoria not only looks terrible, it also manages to sound quite awful as well. The acting is bad, the mixture of live action, 3D and painted backdrops doesn't gel, and the quality of the voice recording makes it sound like their studio was built in the middle of an echo chamber.

Thankfully, we're all mature enough around here to take games for what they are, not just how they look. From that perspective, it's still pretty bad, but in that quaint, delightful kind of way. Once you manage to overlook the technical flaws, you'll find an interesting story that's wrapped up in an archaic but functional adventure game interface. If you've read or watched The Shining, you already know the story, but it's nonetheless a decent

occult romp that should entertain most people interested in things like narrative and... well, not really anything else.

Phantasmagoria was originally designed as an anthology, but never made it past the sequel, A Puzzle of Flesh, which had a cold reception and not-terribly-impressive scores. Some argue that the lack of Roberta Williams in the design role lead to the demise of the series, while others recognise that it was simply the end of an era. It's difficult to say "you must go and play this game" with a straight face. It's not all that good, but it represents an important part of Sierra's history and, if anything, will make you appreciate modern interactive films - Heavy Rain springs to mind – all the more. NAG



THE VIDEO GAME











70M3 Mil auide to DEFINITIE

et's face it; we're only days away from the inevitable zombie apocalypse (ZA). As gamers, we're better equipped than any other force in the world to deal with the undead, thanks to our vast knowledge of weaponry, tactics and the occult gained through years of hardcore gaming. Except, it's not always possible to know exactly what to do when the ZA hits; so we've compiled an extensive selection of literature to help you through the tough times, which we'll share with you while our printing company is still alive enough to print this magazine every month.

#### "BEAT 'EM OR BURN 'EM"

The concept of the walking dead might date back to ancient times, but it only really hit the pop charts with the release of George A. Romero's The Night of the Living Dead in 1968. The film tore the box office to pieces, grossing over \$40 million worldwide with a budget of only \$114,000. Many critics of the time disliked the graphic nature of this black-and-white flick, but it was something unique, and that helped it leave its mark on the world. The film has since been remade a number of times, all of which attempted to bring colour to the monochrome production.

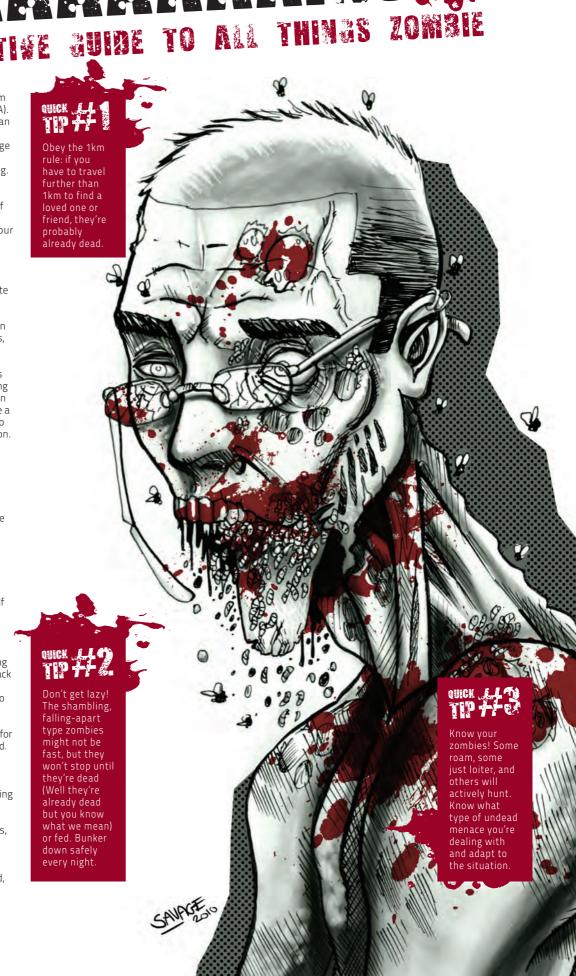
#### DAY ONE SURVIVAL PLAN

You turn on the TV while waiting for your game of CoD to load, hoping to find something worth watching, but all of the channels are filled with a looping video of some military guy telling the world that the ZA has hit. Here's what you do:

Find a weapon: If you're going to save anyone, including yourself, you need to be armed. Grab the nearest sharp or heavy implement you can find and get ready for anything. Sporting equipment is always good, but don't think that your R10,000 golf club is going to perform any better than a hunk of wood with spiky bits on it.

Find food and water: Lots of it, but only what's in the house. Things in tins might not taste the greatest, but they'll last a long time. Pack everything into a sturdy backpack and find the car keys. Save the grocery store raids for when you've had a chance to properly assess the situation.

Find your family: If they've already been turned into the shambling dead, it's too late for saviour but not for a swift whack to the head. If they're still alive, great; they can carry the heavy stuff while you take care of business. Find a safe place: Avoid excessively public places, as they're almost definitely swarming with things that want to eat your brains. Building supply depots will have plenty of stuff to build your ultimate zombie fortress, but a simple gardening store or nursery could supply you with food for a lifetime if you can figure out a hoe from a hose. Similarly, never underestimate the isolated, food-bearing farmlands, and pigs could be your best defence against a wall of rotting flesh if need be. NAG



## WHEN SPEED IS NOT ENOUGH...



















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## 1<sup>st</sup> prize

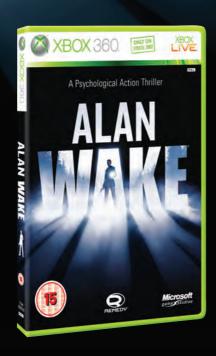
Collector's edition Alan Wake game | Xbox 360 Elite | Mini Mag torch | Halloween junk

**XBOX** 360.

# 

# 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> runner-up prize

Normal edition Alan Wake game | Mini Mag torch









# **GIGABYTE** recharges the iPad

**IGABYTE HAS CONFIRMED THAT** more Intel and AMD chipsets can all charge the iPad – whether the device is in use (on) and also when not in use (off).

According to Frans Smit - Gigabyte product manager at Rectron, the Gigabyte Intel H55/H57, P55, X58 and AMD 800 Series boards all feature Gigabyte's

innovative "3x USB power technology", which boosts the power output of USB 2.0 and 3.0 three times - allowing the iPad to charge through USB while plugged into any PC that makes use of any of these Gigabyte boards.

To download the Gigabyte On/Off Charge driver update, go to www.gigabyte.com.tw/ Support/Motherboard/Utility\_List.aspx

# PS3 gets chip upgrade

The PlayStation 3 console has just received a hardware upgrade in the form of a new graphics chip, more efficient power supply, and a redesigned cooling assembly. According to PlayStation University's Patrick Steen, "A 40 nano-meter chip results in reduced power usage, is less likely to overheat and will require less cooling."

#### PS3 firmware readies 3D

The latest Sony PS3 firmware update (which is on the cover disc this month) will prep the PS3 system for some upcoming new features, according to Sony. These include stereoscopic gaming.

"One million iPads in 28 days - that's less than half of the 74 days it took to achieve this milestone with iPhone."

Apple CEO. Steve Jobs said that they had sold 1 million of their new iPad tablet computers in the month after its launch.

#### Snippets

SteelSeries and Gunner Optiks will be announcing a co-branded series of eyewear products at E3 this month that will "focus on comfort and improving the gamers' performance through reduced eye strain.

Bayer, the pharmaceutical company, has announced a peripheral for the Nintendo DS and DS Lite that will allow you to test your blood glucose level

HP has released its own branded gaming controller for the PC called the **HP Swing** Real-Life Gaming system. It comes pre-packaged with software and is bundled with HP Pavilion computers. No news yet on whether it will be available locally.

Dolby Laboratories have been working on some new audio driver technologies that is said to optimise sound for your laptop. "Approved by Dolby" stickers will appear on select Sony, Acer, Lenovo and Toshiba lantons in the near future.

ASUS have released the **EeeKeyboard**, featuring an Intel Atom N270 processor, an integrated 480x800 capacitive touchscreen, and built-in speakers along with Windows XP on a 16 or 32GB SSD



#### Viewsonic VX2739wm

Viewsonic has announced a 27" Full HD monitor said to be ideal for gaming and entertainment. Features include HDMI. DVI and VGA for video connectivity, and a 4-port USB hub. The VX2739wm has a 1ms response time and sports built-in speakers.

#### New Windows Live Messenger

The new Windows Live Messenger, which will be released as part of the Wave 4 version of Windows Live, will feature a lot of social networking integration. So Facebook, Flickr and YouTube, once tied in to your Messenger account, will give you updates in real-time. The downside is that it will only work with Windows 7 or Vista and not XP.

#### No universal 3D glasses

3D TV manufacturers have not, as yet, agreed to a common standard for Active Shutter glasses, which are needed to view 3D TV images. So, if you and your friend were to both buy 3D TVs but they were different brand names, neither of you would be able to take your 3D glasses to the other person's house to watch a 3D movie together. So for now, if you're planning on getting a 3D TV, at least co-ordinate that everyone you know buys the same brand.

#### Did You Know?

Inspired by moths, scientists at the Fraunhofer Institute for Mechanics of Materials IWM in Freiburg, Germany, have developed a non-reflecting and scratchproof nanocoating for use on displays and eyeglasses. When moths go out at dusk to look for food, they are in danger from predators. So nature has seen fit to offer them some protection in the form of facet eyes. These are perfectly non-reflective, allowing them to remain camouflaged. Using the principles of their nanostructure, researchers have developed a hard material coating that reproduces the opticallyeffective surface structure

#### Know Your Technology

Hyper-Transport (HT): high-bandwidth, lowlatency, point-to-point link double data rate connection. The latest version of HT3.0 (as used in the latest AMD CPUs) supports up to 6400 MT/s. This link is used for high-speed communication usually between two processing nodes. In our desktop CPUs the HT link exists between cores and the memory controller. Hyper Transport links range from 2 to 32-link interconnects and can transfer at up to 51.2GB/s when aggregated.

Hyper-Threading: Intel propriety technology that allows an X-physical core CPU to appear as two logical cores per physical core. This technology is transparent to the operating system and makes use of unused execution resources on the physical core. This is done by duplicating specific parts of the CPU that store architectural state but not the actual resources. Hyper threading can increase performance of each physical core by anything from 5 to 30% typically.

Voltage regulator module (VRM): electronic device that provides microprocessors with an appropriate supply voltage. Most VRMS on our motherboards are voltage sensing so they only supply the power needed by the processor. The required supply voltage is given to the VRM via the VID from the processor. On start-up the VRM usually provides the standard supply voltage to the VID logic from there is behaves likes a voltage regulator providing the required constant voltage to the processor.

Fragment processing: Fragment processing is what is usually done to a primitive during rasterizing. The fragment can be a single pixel, hence pixel and fragment shader are used interchangeably sometimes. In OpenGL this is usually referred to as fragment processing, while in DirectX it's usually called pixel processing. Several steps are performed on a fragment from depth tests to texture mapping and blending. These steps are known as fragment processing.

#### The Mosh Pit

#### LIAN LI PC-X900

For use as a gaming or a Home Theatre PC system, the PC-X900 features a patented tool-less design, for easy building and swapping of components.

www.lian-li.com



#### By the Numbers



Sony will officially stop producing 3.5-inch floppy disks early next year. Sony first introduced the 3.5-inch format to the market in 1981.

#### Hardware Scoring System

- Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.
- Hardware turns on/installs but doesn't do much else.
- This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.
- Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.
  - Middle of the road product that does not stand out from the competitors, performs and works exactly as advertised.
- Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.
- Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.
- Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in
- Excellent product, near perfect.
- The stuff of dreams, the best in the market par none.

#### Hardware Awards



This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.



The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

#### MOTOROLA MILESTONE

Powered by Android 2.1, the Milestone is a hiresolution, multi-touch, pinch and zoom display. It comes integrated with a suite of Google mobile applications including Google Search, Google Maps, Gmail and YouTube. Plus you have access to thousands of apps and widgets from Android Market

www.motorola.com/ milestone

#### HUNTKEY UNIVERSAL NOTEBOOK POWER ADAPTER

Lost your notebook's power adapter, or maybe want a second one to leave at work? Huntkey makes a line of universal power bricks that are compatible with most major manufacturer's machines. They range in output from 36W up to 90W.

www.huntkeydiy.com



#### **SAMSUNG MONTE**

The Monte (S5620) is the new full touch screen kid on the block Features include GPS, supported by Google Latitude, multi-IM capability, and 3.2MP camera.

www.samsung.com





# The Dream Machine



# The best there has ever been

THIS MONTH WE REPLACE our Dream Machine motherboard with an overclockers delight. Neo had this to say:

"It is hard to find something to fault on this motherboard, because as far as the X58 platform goes, this is pretty much the best one can expect."

So the ASUS Rampage III Extreme is the motherboard to have if you want as close to perfect as it gets right now. Now we have to go and wipe Neo's drool off the board before we pack it up and send it back to ASUS.

#### The Damage...

	U
COMPONENT	PRICE*
CASE	NEW! R3,999
PROCESSOR	R9,648
MOTHERBOARD	NEW! R5,099
MEMORY	R1,399
GRAPHICS	R7,881
STORAGE	R3,699
SOUND	R1,688
POWER	R4,200
DISPLAY	R3,577
HEADPHONES	R1,316
KEYBOARD	R2,001
MOUSE	R1,076
TOTAL	R45,583

\* At print time

#### NOTEBOOK

ASUS ROG G51J-3D

rog.asus.com

System Specs:

CPU: Intel Core i7 720M (1.6GHz)
RAM: 4GB DDR3

**Graphics:** NVIDIA GTX260M **HDD:** 2x 320GB SATA2 **OS:** Windows 7 Home Premium

Mouse: Razer Abyss Extra: NVIDIA 3D Vision pack





PROCESSOR Intel Core i7 Extreme 975 www.intel.com



MOTHERBOARD NEW!

ASUS Rampage III Extreme

za.asus.com



MEMORY

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3

www.ocztechnology.com



GRAPHICS **ASUS EAH5970** za.asus.com



STORAGE Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB www.seagate.com



SOUND ASUS Xonar Essence ST \* za.asus.com



CASE

Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID

www.ikonik.com



DISPLAY

Samsung Syncmaster T260 LCD

www.samsung.co.za







MOUSE **Logitech G9x Laser** www.logitech.com

<sup>\*</sup> Does not work with Logitech G35 headphones

# ASUS ROG GSIJX 31



REPUBLIC OF GAMERS



# EXPERIENCE THE REALITY GAMING

Expand your gaming universe on the new ASUS™ ROG™ G51Jx 3D, the world's first notebook with NVIDIA™ 3D Vision and the kind of prodigious power gamers could only dream about until recently. Intel™ Core i5™ dual core and Core i7™ quad core processors plus Turbo Boost™ furnish dynamic performance, reacting in real time with instant overclocking so you never falter in the face of intense action.

True 3D gaming has come of age – enter the next evolutionary phase!

True

Intel Core i7 720 1.6GHz -4 Gb(2x 2Gb) Upgradable to 8Gb -500 Gb HDD 7200rpm nVidia GTX 360M 1 GB DDR5 -

> Includes nVidia 3D Vision Glasses, **Razer Gaming Mouse & Bag**

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Tel: (041) 398 7082 Fax: (041) 398 7135 Bloemfontein:

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# Tech Q&A

From: Lucan

HAVE FOUND THAT WHENEVER I start a move/copy of a file larger than 4MB, my computer starts lagging to the point where even the mouse pointer lags. What would cause this as it wasn't happening three months ago? Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Neo: Could be a virus, malware or some other malicious program replicating itself to whatever you are copying. Check your task manager and look at what is using up all your resources and close the offending program. If that does not fix it, it could be signs of a failing drive.

#### DIRECTX11 ON VISTA OR WINDOWS7?

From: Sameer Hendricks

**EY GUYS, GREAT MAG.** If it wasn't for you gaming would not be as big as it is in SA as it is now. Back to the title of my e-mail - is there any significant difference in performance between running a DirectX11 game in Vista or Windows 7?'

Neo: DirectX11 under Windows 7 is generally faster because the operating system as a whole is faster (driver model simplification, etc...).

#### TV UPGRADE

From: Santa Claus

■■ ■ HAVE A SAMSUNG TV (SS02 32' LCD) I use for console gaming and I've seen that it has a USB port for software upgrades. What kind of upgrades can I expect (in terms of gaming experience too) and are they worth the trouble?"

Neo: The upgrades will vary from model to model, but they will likely allow better colour calibration and other such functionality. If there isn't anything significantly wrong with your LCD, it would be best to avoid the upgrade unless you need the functionality it provides.

#### ASUS XONAR ESSENCE STX

From: Steven Smith

■■ NEED YOUR OPINION/INFINITE WISDOM.

I have posted my question on a few forums but have just received mostly garbage in return. I recently bought a pair of Sennheiser HD515 headphones. As of now they are run through my on-board motherboard sound (Realtek, no great shakes). So far I'm impressed with the sound clarity and bass. I just feel they deserve a good sound card to show off their true potential. After going back to one of my older NAG's, I read your review on the ASUS Xonar Essence STX and was duly impressed.

My question to you is; will the ASUS Xonar Essence STX (with my specific headphones) truly take my songs/games/movies to the next level? The reason I ask is because on ASUS's own site it says "high-end" headphones are needed to take full advantage of the STX. Are my Sennheiser HD515 headphones "high-end" enough to utilize the STX's power and will it be worth the outlay?'

Neo: The STX is always worth the upgrade especially from onboard audio and



very subjective, but I suspect you will be impressed.

3D

From: Brian Crawford

#### **■■** HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THE

developments of 3D gaming with great interest, so your article in March was most welcome. Where on earth did you get the test rig? I have been phoning around without success; in fact the salesman at Rectron in Cape Town had no idea what I was asking about. Any idea what the retail cost of glasses will be? Regards from The Fairest Cape. (Oh yes, obligatory "love the mag")

Neo: Getting a hold of a 3D kit in South Africa is very difficult as nobody stocks the glasses and very few retailers or distributors have 120Hz 3D Monitors. Your best bet is to check out Newegg or Mwave and order online from the US. The kit should land on your door step (including duties) for about R2,300 at the most. The monitor (2233RZ) is about R2,999 locally. A very expensive investment, but one you'll only ever make once.

#### PS3 TO PC MONITOR

From: James

**WOULD LIKE TO KNOW** if it would be possible to use my PS3 with a 3D PC monitor or even a LED monitor, and if so, would the quality be the same of that of a HD Ready TV?

Neo: Yes you can via your HDMI cable, and quality would actually be better than on your HD Ready TV.

#### PROBLEMS WITH NFS SHIFT From: Cassidy Solomons

**NEED SOME HELP WITH** my NFS Shift

game on PC. The problem is that the game stutters from time to time. It happens when I crash into something or I make sharp turns. I tried turning the graphics settings all the way down but it stutters even more. I'm sure my PC is well above min. spec to play this game. I really like this game but the stuttering is becoming irritating. Any idea what's going on?'

Neo: The stuttering could be because of old display drivers. Try 197.45 WHQL; if that doesn't sort out your problems, make sure you do not have any programs in the background writing to your disk or chewing up your CPU cycles. (Ctrl+Alt+Del and look at which programs other than Shift are

guru. Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to lauren@nag.co.za. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get).

using up memory and CPU time and if possible shut them down)

#### **BUYING A PC**

From: Szymon

**AM PLANNING TO BUY** PC parts and assemble it but I don't really know a lot about PC hardware. I am on a R10,000.00 budget and I want a PC that can play the latest games if possible and also one that has quite a bit of storage."

Neo: Given your inexperience with PC hardware as you claim, it would be advisable for you to have it built for you and as such you should contact Evetech [www.evetech.co.za], Matrix Warehouse, Sybaritic, or Prophecy [www.prophecy. co.za] and see what they can build for you for under R10,000.

#### DREAM MACHINE

From: FC Bester

■■ ■ WANNA RUN AN IDEA past you... The Dream Rig of the month page you guys run each month. How 'bout breaking it up and making it more ummm, useful. Bear with me. How 'bout having a table, with like 3 system builds. One can be the insanely expensive "Dream Rig" then u have ones that most readers <20 can afford, at around R7,000 and then a middle one at around R12,000.

This way people can make informed choices when they buy pc's and not get ... ummm robbed by computer stores. Would kind of be a guideline of sorts... and then you can tie it in with the requirement system you guys have for the reviews. Like R7,000 will get you a 3 star rating PC, R12,000 gets you a 5 star...

Just kinda tired of seeing people spend R8,000 on a PC then their kid can't even play Call of Duty on it, and the people show me the PC, and tell it MUST have a virus on, it CAN'T be this slow... then some swine made a buck out of their lack of knowledge concerning these things. Anyway. Just my thoughts."

**Neo:** It's a Dream Machine page and is not meant to be a buying guide, but rather what we would build if money and local availability was not an issue at all. Thanks for your suggestion though - it's a good idea and relevant point, so we might do something one month in a standalone article. NAG



# IGNITE TRUE-TO-LIFE BATTLES ASUS G SERIES

With an exterior design reminiscent of a futuristic robot warrior, the ASUS G51Vx deploys a full array of technological armaments to give you the edge. Fight against the forces of darkness with the illuminated chiclet keyboard, and cut down on your reaction time for fast reflexes. Strike before the enemy can react with dedicated gaming hotkeys. Superior EAX<sup>TM</sup> technology provides true-to-life battle effects with immersive CMSS surround, coupled with premium Altec Lansing® speakers. Hear and feel every squeeze of the trigger and every stealthy enemy footfall. Equipped with an Intel® Centrino<sup>TM</sup> 2 processor and genuine Window Vista® Home Premium, the ASUS G51Vx is equipped with a NVIDIA® GeForce<sup>TM</sup> GTX 260M graphic card, along with the PhysX<sup>TM</sup> physics enhancement engine that provides a sense of realism

to the gaming experience. Experience the new ASUS G51Vx today. You'll find that virtual reality has just become a lot more real.



NVIDIA GEFORCE GTX 260M







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# Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID Chassis

to cool the water it pumps to cool your rig. They don't look all that large, but are built just like car radiators, with naimen cooling and an S-curve fin for maximum cooling each of these chunky radiators, and there's a 140mm exhaust fan in the rear, two 80mm at the bottom, and another two 120mm drawing cool air in from the front. It's apparently able to cope with up to 500W of raw heat.

Although it's a great dream for those of us addicted to pumping water through our PCs, the integrated chassis and water-cooler idea as a rule is a bit of a disgrace. This Ikonik Ra X10, is then absolutely emphatically the exception that proves this rule. The great finish and detailing starts in the front, the aluminium of the top cover having the most deliciously tactile finish, and this is tangible throughout this chassis. There's plenty of I/O at the top, as well as the Liquid Flow Indicator LED which is a rather cool thing itself.

Yes, the tank and pump is an integrated unit, but still highly-rated and seemingly very robust in solid-feeling brushed aluminium. The pipes used are thick enough for good flow of coolant, and incorporate those handy quick-coupling, self-healing connectors in case you need to get at something on the other side of one. But the CPU block is the most interesting component. Inside the substantial copper block this case uses a wavy-bed pattern consisting of 283 solid copper cooling "pillars". Somehow it all makes sense; cool cores of a slightly different nature.





Excess once again. Six 5.25" bays, with a converter for 3.5" external devices, are complemented by eight 3.5" bays, two of which also double in a 2.5"-capable slots for SSDs. All drive installation is toolless. Even removing the face for access to the 5.25" slots is a one-touch affair. Drives and the PSU are suspended on squishy rubber grommets in case of the Earth tearing itself asunder beneath you, while the Tiger Claw spring-loaded feet are the ideal final touch on a superbly built, detailed, and thought-out extreme chassis option.

#### Specifications

Case type: Full Tower

**Dimensions:** 220 x 572 x 608 mm

**5.25" bays:** 6, including converter kit for

3.5": external device 3.5" internal drive bays: 8

Expansion slots: 8 Material: Aluminium

I/O: 2 x eSATA, 4 x USB, 1 x Firewire,

Cooling: 2 x front 120mm, 1 x rear 140mm, 2 x rear bottom 80mm, 2 x 4 80mm side fans on radiators

**Protection:** Rubber grommets on HDD and PSU railings

**Filtration:** Removable and washable filters, HDD cage and MB tray

#### MESSAGING COMES ALIVE WITH THE LG CHATTERBOXSLIM.

If you think messaging is just another way to communicate, think again. The LG GW300's QWERTY keyboard lets you text faster and easier, and the unique LiveSquare<sup>TM</sup> makes your experience as rich and fun as talking to your friends. Come play with us in LiveSquare<sup>TM</sup>. 2 GIG Micro SD Card, Headset and PC Synchronisation Kit included in Handset box.



#### LG ChatterboxSlim LG GW300

www.lge.co.za Customer care 0800 LG LG LG Mon - Sat 08:00 - 17:00







# It takes effort to be great

\*HERE'S NOTHING AS GREAT as technology, electronics and computing. While there is plenty of room for creativity, at the end of it all, it usually comes down to numbers and how those numbers are used. The magic is in the science and the engineering, and the creativity is how you bring that out. So no manufacturer should ever defend a bad product, they should simply build a better one next time around. Be it a VGA card, RAM, an SSD drive or a motherboard, the next one should be better than the last, or at least it should look like there was effort to make it better than the last.

If you want a better product, then invest in your R&D, in your engineering and actually interact with the people who buy your products. That interaction is much cheaper than manufacturing something and then finding out later

One memorable and admirable thing that MSI did at MOA 2008 was sit with a large number of overclockers and asked for suggestions on how to improve their products. That was a real effort that not only showed interest in the people they are trying to sell to, but the willingness to learn and improve on their products. Ever since then, MSI motherboards have been steadily improving, and at this rate they will join the top two very soon. This was a shift in mindset from the people of MSI. It didn't happen by chance and other manufacturers should follow in their footsteps.

The greatest and most revered manufacturers became this good not through magic, but by building on every product they ever produced, good or bad. It was the challenges they took on that put them where they are.

Right now, we have far fewer motherboard manufacturers than before. While some have ceased to be because of questionable business decisions, many of those companies' problems began when their products started falling behind. When complacency and lack of insight becomes the order of the day, it's a downward spiral from then on. When you think of motherboards, VGA cards and such, there's a reason why you think of specific brands. Each one of them has left an impression on you. Ten years ago we had more manufacturers than we have now, yet the competition is much tougher, and what was acceptable then is now sub-standard and not worth your time.

A motherboard was considered prohibitively expensive at \$128; today it's not uncommon to find a \$380 motherboard (the Rampage III Extreme for example), which is almost three times the price, but is in features and chipset performance, three times what the KT400 based Soyo motherboard was at the time. The components available are better and the standard that is expected from motherboards has increased dramatically.

. Soltek, Soyo, FIC, ABIT, Epox and many others have fallen by the way side, all failing to keep up and innovate in a timely manner. BITt, which pioneered BIOS tuning, stopped being relevant; product after product they failed to capture the hearts and wallets of enthusiasts and gamers the world over. Then they lost their biggest asset in Oscar Wu, who left and started working at DFI

What happened at DFI was nothing short of magical,

and they produced platform-leading motherboards, such as the DFI LanParty NF2 Ultra, the SLI-DR, P35 Dark and others. The difference that one person made was not only because he was a great engineer, but he was in touch with the people the companies were attempting to sell to. (DFI-Street forums came about because of him.)

Since then, ABIT went from being the best (think NF7-S etc...) to completely irrelevant and subsequently shut

Foxconn, which is the largest of the manufacturers (many times over), is virtually gone from the Channel business because, while they were making great products when Peter Tan (Sahmino) was working there, when he left the channel business (at least for enthusiasts and power users) fell apart and everything that their Quantum Force range stood for, was gone. From producing great products such as the Mars, BlackOps, Destroyer and the . Bloodrage, seemingly nobody cares about their newer

"The magic is in the science and the engineering, and the creativity is how you bring that out. So no manufacturer should ever defend a bad product, they should simply build a better one next time around.

products. Their golden goose left and ended up at EVGA and as soon as he was at EVGA the company produced products such as the Classified, P55 FTW and SR-02, which are right up there with the best of them and in some cases unmatched.

A similar thing happened with GIGABYTE, which went from a very gimmicky manufacturer to the top of the hill, with the addition of HiCookie who, much like Peter Tan, is a great overclocker, good at electronics and most importantly interacts with the enthusiasts and translates that into some of the most impressive products the market has ever seen.

As you can see there is a pattern here and a common factor about all these companies which have done well at some point. When they began to speak with the most demanding customers, they started to produce better products and at the same time were able to charge even more for them. The one-way learning experience does not work; if any company is not talking to its customers its message is not getting out. Price is not a great way to sell any motherboard because even the top three manufacturers have very cheap boards and, given the choice, a person would rather buy the brand with the well respected high-end motherboard than the one that only ever makes budget products and not that well either.



# PITSTOP T1

**Mini-ITX Spider Test Bench** 



To ensure user can put everything together easily, Lian Li designer decided to use only standard PC component inside TEST BENCH system, it supports  ${\sf TEST}$ standard motherboard on the top, therefore install this tiny board can be very easy.

#### PITSTOP T7

**Mini-ITX Test Bench** 

## PITSTOP T60

ATX / MATX Test Bench

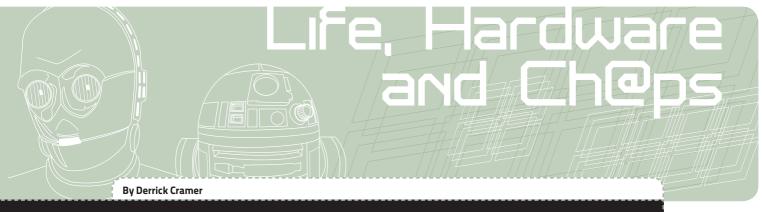












# An Apple a day keeps the flash away...

ASA RULE OF thumb I tend to stay away from writing about products that have huge mainstream hype surrounding them, and for good reason. Take "Fermi", or, as you would know it, the new NVIDIA 4xx series, for example. Tech enthusiasts the world over came to blows over rumours, counter rumours and general FUD floating around before the release date. It was terrible. And it's happening again, this time between Apple and

The problem, oversimplified, is this: Apple won't let flash, one of Adobe's premier products, run on their iPhones and iPads, which cuts out a serious market when you take into account over one million iPads have been sold to date. In the USA alone. Just think about it for a second. Right, second's over, moving on. Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, recently published an open letter detailing why Apple has prevented flash support and raises some very valid points, clearing up any misconceptions the fighting masses may have had, and giving them a whole array of new issues to raise. Let's take a look

#### RELIABILITY, SECURITY AND PERFORMANCE "Symantec recently highlighted Flash for having one of the worst security records in 2009. We also know firsthand that Flash is the number one reason Macs crash.

Right, poor security and reliability, there's a starting point. Everyone knows how easy Flash is to exploit, and for years Adobe has sat by doing what at best is "not much" to fix the obvious holes in Flash. Do you really want your device open to the public? If Macs have a bad reputation for reliability, and if the chief reason for this poor record is flash, why would Apple possibly want this trend to continue on their newer products? Performance, let's not get started on that either. Job's was quoted as writing, "Flash has not performed well on mobile devices... We have never seen it." Apple has never seen it, and quite frankly neither have I. I have a laptop that Flash causes to lag and crash, so would I consider trying it on a far less powerful mobile device? Not a chance.

#### **BATTERY LIFE**

First, some quotes from Jobs.

"To achieve long battery life... mobile devices must decode the video in hardware; decoding it in software uses too much power... On an iPhone ... H.264 videos play for up to 10 hours ... videos decoded in software play for less than five...

So what would you like, an old, redundant, software-based decoding utility that eats battery life faster than cousin Freddie at a vetkoek stand, or a modern, hardware based decoder that's used in modern technology such as Blu-ray players? One that gives you double the battery life I might add. Easy choice, next.

"Flash was designed for PCs using mice, not for touch screens using fingers.'

Something you may not expect to be a prominent problem can turn into a headache for developers. Ever heard of a rollover? Well do this, when you're next on YouTube, move the mouse over the video and watch as the progress bar rises up. That's a rollover, when something happens as you move your mouse over the Flash window. How will this work with a stylus or finger? You'd move your pressed finger over the rollover, lift it to tap and select a button

"So what would you like, an old, redundant, software-based decoding utility that eats battery life faster than cousin Freddie at a vetkoek stand?"

within the rollover, and watch how it disappears before you have time to select it. Irritating for the user? The developer agrees.

#### 3RD PARTY DEVELOPMENT

The main reason Apple wants to steer clear of Flash: 3rd party development of applications for its products. What this will lead to in Apple's view is a slew of substandard applications that could potentially ruin your iExperience. To quote Jobs yet again:

"The third party may not adopt enhancements from one platform unless they are available on all of their supported platforms. Hence developers only have access to the lowest-common-denominator set of features."

Couldn't have said it better myself, although I'll have a crack at it. Apple doesn't want applications that won't take full advantage of its hardware, and they don't want to be limited by other platforms. Is it logical? Yes. Is it arrogant? Yes. Is it true? Well, at the moment yes

If you're wondering why I'm talking software in a hardware column, go back to paragraph two and read the first half again. One million units since release, in the USA alone, and that's doesn't count iPhone sales. I'm not a fan of Apple products, I can't stand a Mac, and the iPod's 'cool factor' is wasted on me. However, with the iPhone and iPad, Apple has provided stellar products. In the ongoing debate with Adobe, Apple has given reasons that have the consumers experience in mind. Very unlike Apple, very appreciated, very... refreshing. NAG

# INCAPPED A CONTROLL AND SILVEN BOOK STORY AND SILVEN BOOK STORY AND SILVEN BOOK SILVEN BOO

ADSL BROADBAND
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HOSTING & DOMAINS
DIAL UP

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Email Support 24/7
Unlimited Inbox Storage
My[dot] Intuitive Control Panel
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# **DIY: Hands-on with Dremel**

# Part 4: Xbox 360 modding - controller LED mod and paint-job

NTHIS TUTORIAL, WE'RE going to continue our Xbox modification from last month by drawing our attention to the controller. We'll be colour-coding the controller, as well as installing LEDs inside the ABXY buttons for an interesting effect. You can take the principles in this tutorial to add LEDs to any part of the controller; if you'd like, you could even draw from the rumble motor power source and you'll have nifty vibration-activated LEDs.

#### STEP 1: DISASSEMBLE

We'll need to remove the seven screws holding the controller together. Six are easy to spot, but the seventh is hidden beneath the barcode sticker inside the battery bay. Depending on your revision of the controller, you may have to deal with the security nubs inside the head of the Torx screws that prevent you from getting a screwdriver in; either have the right screwdriver, or just drill out the nubs; they should snap off quite easily.

With the screws out, the controller can simply be pulled apart. Once you're inside, remove everything from the circuit board. The D-pad can be removed by unscrewing the pad from its base, then popping out the retaining clips. Everything else but the triggers should be a cinch to remove.

#### STEP 2: CLEAN AND PAINT

Much like last month's tutorial, you'll need to make sure that every surface you intend to paint is clean and dry. I've chosen to keep the triggers plain white because they're a pain to remove from the PCB, and they'll provide a nice accent that way. Give everything three light coats of paint, with 10-20 minutes drying time between coats. Don't forget to spray the back/start buttons, but leave the D-pad and analogue sticks as they are.

#### STEP 3: PREPARE AND INSTALL THE LEDS

We'll need to create some space inside those buttons for our LEDs, so drill out the four pegs in each button. Drill down to the base until you've got a uniform surface; too many imperfections at the base will result in weird blotchy shadows cast from the LEDs. Try to get the base as thin as possible, but don't drill through to the letters. Using a knife or Dremel with a rotary blade, cut a small space into the rim of each button just above the notch, so you can get the wires through without messing with the button-pressing mechanism.

Prepare the LEDs by trimming down their leads as much as possible, and solder colour-coded wires to each end (bright colours for positive, dark colours for negative).

For each button, drop a small amount of hot glue inside and then insert your wired-up LED. Add more glue until the surface is level with the white inner plastic; use the back of a pencil to level it out. When all the LEDs are in place, trim off any excess wire (set the buttons in place to see how much space you have to work with) and solder the LEDs in parallel. If necessary, add a length of wire to the negative wires to take it to the PCB, and then solder the 22 ohm resistor to the positive wires. See the image on this page for which points you'll be soldering your wires to, there's one 5v pin and a ground pin that we'll be using near the bottom of the PCB This particular arrangement is the easiest to do, but will also drain the battery even when the controller is off; it's also only suitable for wireless controllers that take batteries, and simply won't work if you use Play and Charge kits (these need to be wired differently). If you have a multimeter, check the rest of the PCB for 5v and ground points, you could use those instead if you wish; alternatively you could wire up a switch.

#### STEP 4: REASSEMBLE

Putting everything together again can be a pain; do everything upside-down, if that helps. You'll need to keep all the buttons in place while ensuring that the grey contact pads don't slide around. Don't forget to re-attach the rumble motors. Thankfully, everything can only fit together in one particular way, so take your time and find where everything belongs and you'll be fine. NAG

**Geoff Burrows** 

#### What you will need

- Controller (I'm using an Xbox 360 wireless controller)
- Torx 9 screwdriver, possibly one with a security bit
- A drill with a 4mm drill bit (and a 2mm bit if you don't have the correct Torx screwdriver)
- Vinvl paint
- 1x 22ohm resistor
- 4x white 3mm 3.3v LEDs
- Thin electrical wiring
- Low-temp or variable-temp glue gun with glue
- Small Philips screwdriver
- A pair of pliers and/or wire cutters





It's easy to determine the resistors that you'll need to use for your LEDs, but take note that different colours require different current. The formula for resistance is: Resistance is equal to (source voltage minus LED voltage) divided by desired LED current, or R = (VS - VL) / I. In this case, our source voltage is 5v our LEDs are 3.3v, and the desired current is 20mA (0.02A). Check with your supplier for the exact specs of the LEDs and resistors if vou're in any doubt. Always choose the next highest resistor, as it's not always possible to find the exact resistor for your













#### Tips from the experts

Glue guns are handy devices for all sorts of DIY work. Unlike liquid glues, hot glue will set quickly and create a strong hold. Usually you can choose between low-temperature or hightemperature glue guns: low-temp guns heat up to about 120° Celsius and are suited for jobs where your work piece can get damaged if the glue is too hot. High temp guns go up to almost 200° Celsius and produce stronger bonds. The Dremel Glue Gun model 1200 allows you to switch between low and high temperature and therefore widens the range of applications. Always wait until the heating element has

fully heated up. More sophisticated glue guns like the Dremel model 1200 have anti drip tips. Before you start your job, let the glue from your previous job that still sits in the nozzle drop through. The most common lengths for DIY glue sticks are 7-11mm, and sticks have different open times and set times. Open time is the working time to make a bond while the surface still retains sufficient tack. Set time is the time to form a bond of acceptable strength. Open and set time depend on the composition of the glue, glue temperature, substrate and other factors.

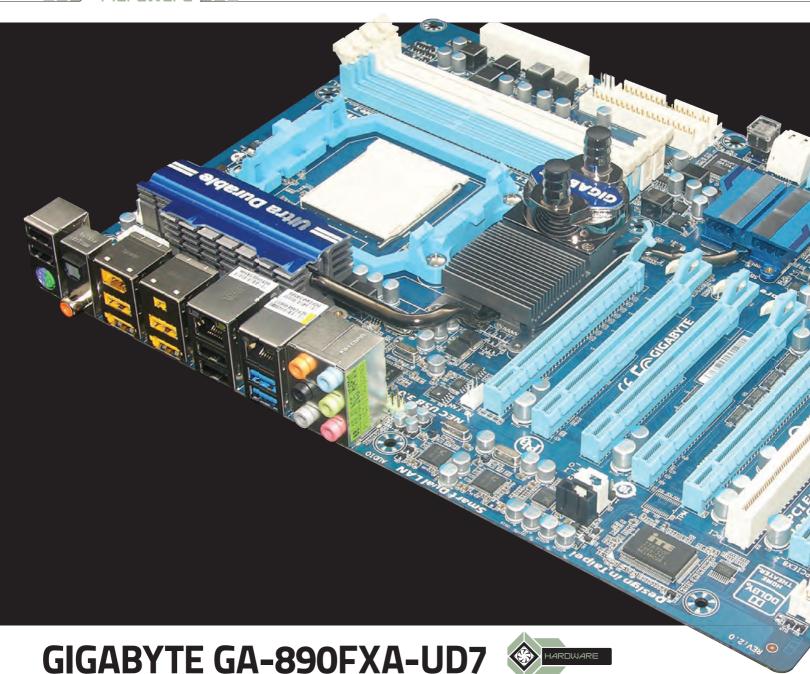
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T SEEMS OF LATE that there has been a drive by motherboard manufacturers to push the limits of any platform and chipset. The competition has never been this intense, and it's hard finding a truly disappointing product within the products of the top four or five motherboard manufacturers.

A fine example of this is the GIGABYTE GA-890FXA-UD7 motherboard; there simply isn't a better AM3 motherboard. In fact, this is likely the best motherboard ever to utilise an AMD CPU. If that seems like a bold claim, believe us it is not, for when this motherboard is put through its paces, there's simply nothing else out there that does it with such ease, and what it delivers is world records.

Before we get into the performance figures and what truly makes the motherboard tick, it's worth mentioning this is, if you will, the direct descendant of the 790FXA-UD5 motherboard we reviewed in November 2009. This one however, as the "UD7" denotes, is not an equivalent of the 790 based motherboard but its successor, and

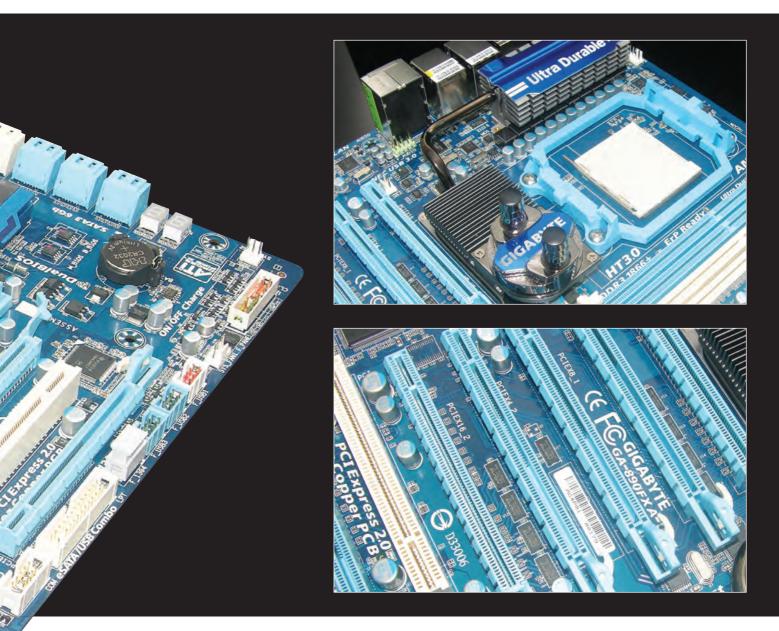
is superior in every respect. This motherboard, unlike any other AMD chipset board from GIGABYTE, is built for the enthusiast who will settle for nothing less than the best of what the 890FX and SB850 chipset has to offer.

As new as the chipset is, what the design team in Taiwan has done with this motherboard is simply incredible. The motherboard is wider than a standard ATX board (XL-ATX at 325mm), but should fit in most mid- to high-end cases just fine. With the extra width though you get a total of 6 PCI-Express full lengths slots, which means all combinations of Crossfire are supported either using dual or single GPU cards

Aesthetics are not what this board is about, but it's rather good-looking, featuring the latest light and deep blue colour scheme with white racing lines on the heatsinks. If you will, it's what the 790FXA-UD5 would have looked like if it were on Steroids. Everything on the motherboard seems very well thought out, from the Power, Reset and Clear CMOS buttons, the PCI-Express slot spacing

to the 8 SATA 6Gbps ports. The UD7 just may be the proof needed that AMD's platforms are once again becoming a serious alternative for power users. There are all sorts of USB ports and headers on the board, the typical ALC889A Audio controller (with Dolby Home Theatre support) and just about everything else you would expect on the most high-end GIGABYTE motherboards.

As impressive as all that is, it's what the motherboard is able to do when pushed to the limits that will make it legendary. Armed with a 1008 CPMW stepping Phenom II XD6 1090T Black Edition CPU, we were able to break the Phenom II X6 PiFast World Record with a good 17.91sec time, and posted several other noteworthy results. The highest speed achieved and validated on this motherboard was a blistering 6.4GHz with the CPU, which was another Top 10 result. There is no doubt that with an even better CPU sample, better results can be achieved. With this motherboard, the limitations are always going to be the CPU and not the board, as it was stable for hours on end, with clock



speeds increasing even after hours under load, with some components operating well under -100'C. This level of quality is sorely missed when dealing with AMD based motherboards, and it's great to have it back in what is probably the best 890FX motherboard we are likely to see for some time.

Throughout testing there was not a single anomaly with the performance numbers, and for the most part the results exceeded expectations, and even with more mundane air coolers, the overclocking headroom for the CPU was nothing short of impressive.

It seems that GIGABYTE has produced a wonder in the 890FXA-UD7. We tested using a beta BIOS for our results (F2a) but the motherboard produced solid and repeatable results all the time.

For those who are not interested in the most extreme forms of computing, the 890FXA-UD7 is still the motherboard to have, with dual Gigabit Ethernet connectivity, USB3.0 support, 10 rear USB ports and an additional six supported via motherboard headers so you should not be running out of ports anytime soon. Not only are there plenty of them, but each one provides enough power to recharge the Apple "I-Pad" which, despite sounding like

a marketing gimmick more than anything else, is actually worth mentioning, because not every motherboard provides enough power for this.

Given that AMD's CPUs performance isn't where Intel's CPUs are right now, one would not have expected such detail and care to be put into a motherboard for the AM3 platform. However GIGABYTE has done it, and if there was ever a motherboard to pair with the X6 CPUs, this would be the one. In fact, we would go out and say this motherboard is near perfect. With the little that the 890FX chipset brings over the 790FX it replaces, it's amazing to see a motherboard that is dramatically different from its predecessor.

If you're looking to invest into the AMD platform or are looking for cutting edge performance with no compromises, the 890FX is unlikely to be presented in a better package than what GIGABYTE has put together and, as strange as it may seem, we have nothing bad to say about the motherboard at all. We won't say it's 100% perfect, but it's as close as we've seen, and if there were an AMD based Dream Machine, this would be the motherboard we would choose. NAG

Neo Sibeko

#### Specifications

Chipset: AMD 890FX+850SB Memory banks: 4x DDR3 240-pin CPU Support: AMD AM3 Phenom II/ Athlon II **Slots:** 6x PCI-E 16X (16x 4x 8x 4x 16x 8x), 1x PCI 2.2

#### Benchmarks

Cinebench 11.5: 6.16 SuperPi 8M: 3min 58.025 Everest Read: 8,751 Everest Write: 6,835 Everest Copy: 11,422 Latency: 49.7

3DMark Vantage CPU: 16,690

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Performance
- + Stability
- + Features

#### >MINUS

- Limited local availability (orders placed on request)

#### >Bottom Line

There aren't many products that can claim to be near perfect, but the 890FXA-UD7 is about as close as we've ever seen.





# ASUS Rampage III Extreme



**50 HOW DOES THE** number one motherboard manufacturer (in terms of sales) improve on what was an already well-received product? Simple. They make an even better one. As cheesy as that may sound, it's not so when one looks and uses the Rampage III Extreme. While we may have been impressed by the Rampage II Extreme, this motherboard has taken it to a new level.

Asus has borrowed a few ideas from EVGA's Classifed motherboard which was squarely targeted at Overclockers. Fortunatey for us, Asus has brought those ideas to the masses. No, actually that's untrue; this motherboard is aimed squarely at the extreme overclocker who will not compromise on anything. Proof of this is how most of the world records on the X58 platform were broken with this motherboard, which can seemingly turn an average CPU into something special.

Before you consider this motherboard, it must be said that it is larger than traditional ATX boards and anyone with a chassis that cannot take an E-ATX motherboard need not bother because it will not fit. For all the added space however, ASUS has made some impressive design decisions and brought them together in what is, for the moment, the ultimate X58 motherboard on the market. From Quad SLI to Quad Crossfire, it is all supported with good spacing too. So seeing four GPU "pots" on this motherboard will become a regular thing for the extreme and competitive overclocker.

As great as the motherboard looks (arguably the best looking motherboard ASUS has ever manufactured) it's the least impressive aspect when compared to what the Rampage III Extreme can do technically. Not only does it feature the renowned

FCCAP capacitors, it has dual 12V ATX 8-pin connectors which allow the CPU to draw more current than a single connector. As proven by many enthusiasts, Intel's Core i7 980X and even the previous 45nm 975XE CPUs overclock better and are more stable at those stratospheric speeds when there's more power available to the CPU.

One would expect the Rampage III Extreme to feature dual Gigabit Ethernet ports, however this is not the case and only one is supported. The Rampage III Extreme is light on the fashionable gimmicks but heavy on performance and technical wizardry.

Given the space constraints, it is not possible to go into just how impressive the motherboard layout and electrical component list is. From Bluetooth overclocking to the ROG connect, the two CMOS clear buttons and highly advanced auto overclocking options, this motherboard is just littered with buttons that are useful for the overclocker. Every area of the motherboard has some unique feature, from set voltage measuring points, a Bios switching button, the Go buttons (voltage altering at the flick of a few switches) to the four full speed PCI-Express slots, it doesn't get any more extreme than the Rampage III Extreme.

The BIOS is a similar story. After years spent familiarizing ourselves with the ASUS BIOS layout, on the Rampage III Extreme even more options have been added. In fact, it's very easy to get lost in the options. They are not irritatingly detailed like those on some DFI motherboards. No the ASUS BIOS presents what you already know, just with more sub options. The BIOS is just as incredible as the electronics of the motherboard.

It is hard to find something to fault on this motherboard, because as far as the X58 platform goes, this is pretty much the best one

#### Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R Memory banks: 4 x DDR3 184-pin CPU Support: Intel Core i7 (1366)

**Slots:** 4 x PCI-E 16X (16x), 1 x PCI-E 4X, 1 x PCI 2.2

#### Benchmarks

Cinebench 11.5: 6.3 SuperPi 8M: 2min 5.736 Everest Read: 18,003 Everest Write: 14,954 Everest Copy: 21,848 Latency: 48.1

3DMark Vantage CPU: 22,383

can expect. It's a pity about the heat levels of the Northbridge, but that is nothing a small fan cannot fix, and, truth be told, this motherboard is meant to be on an Overclocking work bench and not hidden in a case.

The ASUS Rampage III Extreme is easily the best there has ever been! NAG

Neo Sibeko

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Exceptional performance
- + Overclocking ability
- + Features

#### >MINUS

- Very Hot ICH
- Daunting BIOS

#### >Bottom Line

The Best X58 we have tested thus far. Not for the light-hearted, but little or nothing else is close.





### Thermaltake Element V

THERMALTAKE SEEMS TO HAVE an Element for every day-to-day scenario. This, the Element V, is the lunatic of the bunch – the multicoloured over-fanned hyper-vented party animal, in PC chassis terms.

It's basically a mid- to high-end gaming chassis. So there are a heap of fans pre-installed, including a big 230mm side fan for pulling that heat straight away from your graphics cards. And while half the fans are nattylooking multi-bladed affairs, the other half are more regularly-shaped but lit with a multitude of neon colours - red, blue, green, and purple. And you can cycle between any of these colours or the fully epileptic seizure-inducing strobe which flashes rapidly between all of them.

Of course you are given manual control of all the cooling too, which is a good thing because everything on high is only good for noisy LAN parties. But then there are four 200mm fans in there as well as the big mother on the side, so it's to be expected.

Thermaltake has once again employed its genius contact-patch PCBs to the thorny problem of powering the fan encased in a panel which has to come off quite regularly. So as the panel comes off, the contact patch is broken, no snapping power cables which

#### Specifications

Motherboard support: Mini ATX, Full ATX, Extended ATX

5.25" bays: 5

**3.5" bays:** 6 (+1 2.5" SSD bay)

Expansion slots: 7

they've supplied for internal headers.

While the case is built to a pretty high standard and has plenty of space for drives and add-on cards, there are a couple of peculiarities, like the positioning of the water-cooling holes, right at the bottom of the case just above the PSU. You'll have to run tubes right across your PCI-E and PCI slots to get to your CPU block. The mounting for the 2.5" drive right at the bottom of the front of the case requires you to tip it over to attach the screws from underneath.

The personality reflects all the flashy fans attached to it: pretty, wellbuilt, glitzy, but lacking in real depth of quality. Still, it does offer enough to make it worth the money at least, even if it does have certain bothersome qualities. NAG

**Russell Bennett** 

#### Front I/O: USB x 4, HD Audio, eSATA x 1 is always good. The company has also made absolutely sure of the connections

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Nice design
- + Mesmerising
- + Excellent airflow

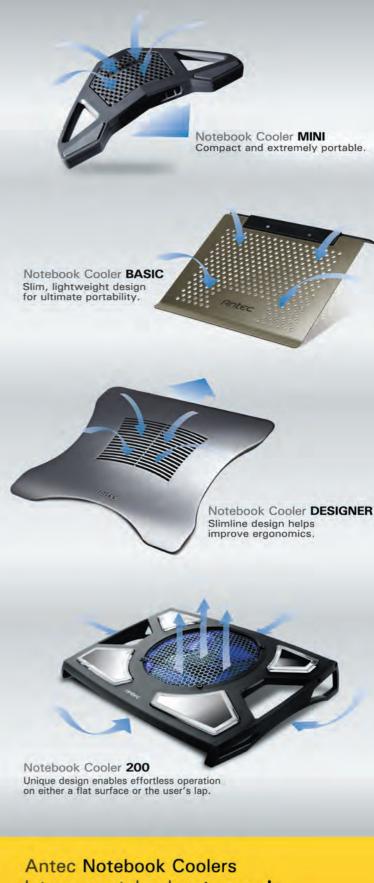
#### >Minus

- A few elements misplaced
- Some odd build quirks
- Noisy at full tilt

#### >Bottom Line

You're paying for the looks. But underneath the pretty face, is a decent if slightly uninspiring chassis at least.





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# SAPPHIRE HD5870 2GB GDDR5 (Eyefinity 6 Edition)

THERE'S NO DENYING THAT ATI and its products have thus far been the face of DirectX11. Barring the technical side of the products, the company's release schedule has been nothing short of incredible, and just about every product from the fastest HD5970 to the lowliest 5450 card has some appeal over its competitor's products.

As if the Radeon HD5870 was not already as close to perfect as possible, ATI recently released the Eyefinity 6 Edition cards. While regular 5870 cards (at least those based on reference design) support Eyefinity, and are limited to three displays, this new card offers for the first time, an unheard of six displays. This allows the most ridiculous screen resolutions (including 5,760 x 2,180) you can imagine. You can now get your game rendered across six displays for what some may consider the ultimate immersive gaming environment. As for how well this works for gaming, we will get to a little later.

ATI had to make some changes to the standard 5870 to accommodate six displays outputs. Physically the card is a little longer than the reference 5870 and naturally packs six outputs (courtesy of mini-HDMI). To deal with the added load of having to render 12.5 million pixels at any given frame, the card has been outfitted with an additional 1GB of GDDR5 memory. A wise decision considering that a simple desktop background picture can consume up to 50MB of frame buffer memory, so one can imagine how much larger the footprint is for games. For regular use however the extra memory has no benefit at any playable resolution or setting because by the time the 1GB card would have run out of headroom, the frame rates are usually in the single digits or early teens

and more memory cannot fix that.

The Eyefinity 6 card is ideally suited to gamers interested in flight simulators, MMOs and driving games where you can take advantage of the added real estate. However for FPS games the whole idea of having six displays falls apart. Besides the prohibitive cost of having such a configuration, the performance is far too low and one would have to sit further away from the combined display than what is usually possible. In most FPS games, it is not possible to place the crosshair exactly where it should be (which is the space that the LCD Bezels take up) and makes for what is ultimately an unplayable experience. A more relevant split is the 3-way Eyefinity configuration which lends itself much better to most games.

Given the price of the card, and the price of six displays, one is really better off with two 30" LCDs which are more manageable, consume less power, and are better in just about every other way.

For creative, editing or development work, or other types of environments, the Eyefinity 6 card will shine, and there just isn't anything else at this price range that will give you this functionality. If you're one such user then there is little question as to whether this card is worth it or not: in such an environment it's a must have. For gaming however it's a nice-to-have if you can afford it but far too impractical to be of any benefit.

If you still want such a card purely for gaming purposes though you'll be happy to know that the Eyefinity 6 card performs just as well as the regular 5870 and in some cases slightly (a few frames) faster. It does not support any display that is not capable of HD (that is 720 and 1080) which means that no 5:4, 17" or 19" LCDs are

#### Specifications

**Core:** 850MHz Cypress (40nm) Processors: 1,600

**Memory:** 2GB GDDR5 4.8GHz (153.6GB/sec) API: DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.0

#### Benchmarks

Render Outputs: 16

Heaven Benchmark 2.0: 927 3DMark Vantage: P19315 3DMark06: 22.540

Crysis Warhead 1,920 x 1,080: 59.13fps

Resident Evil 5: 102fps

supported. Given the price of the card however, you're not likely to be using such a small LCD if you're interested in the Eyefinity 6.

Overall, it's the same 5870 we saw many months ago, still just as brilliant if not a little better, but for most people the regular or pre-overclocked 5870s that SAPPHIRE manufacture are more than enough. NAG

Neo Sibeko

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + 2GB GDDR5
- + Performance
- + Six-display support

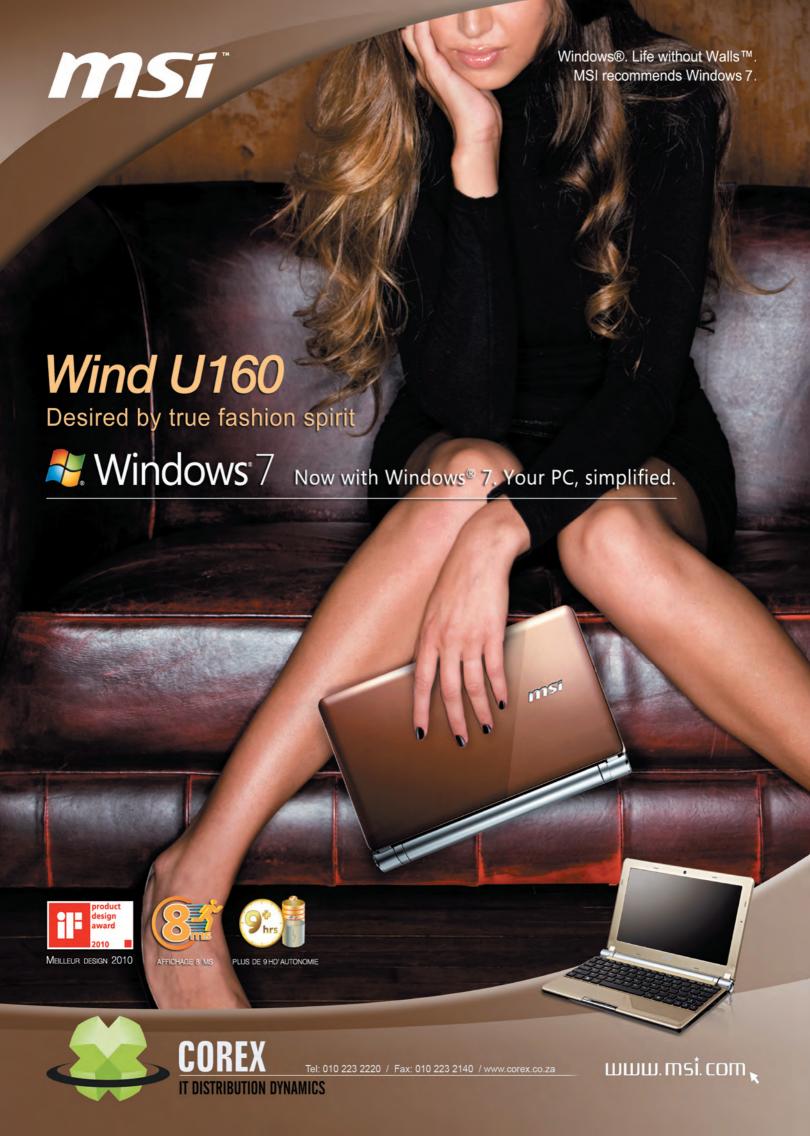
#### >MINUS

- No support for non-HD displays
- Niche product

#### >Bottom Line

The only real option for six-display gaming on the market. If you're heavily into simulators and such, this is the card for you.









# Thermaltake SpinQ VT vs. **COGAGE TRUE Spirit-1366**

PU COOLERS HAVE BEEN a big business since our computers moved on from heatsink-free components (think 486 CPUs and such) and as with most things, despite being limited by the laws of thermodynamics, the industry as a whole has made great strides. Today the difference between the best and the worst CPUs coolers is much closer than it has ever been, and almost all aftermarket coolers are better than what Intel and AMD have been providing for the longest time

The biggest differentiator for coolers now is pricing, ease of installation and compatibility. To this end, between the two CPU coolers here, the SpinQ is undoubtedly ahead. It's compatible with several sockets, including, but not limited to, AM3, 1366 and all other relevant sockets over the last five years. In contrast, the TRUE Spirit is exclusively for the LGA1366 platform. This could be a major issue for some users, but COGAGE does have the ARROW unit which has a little more compatibility (and is certainly a better cooler it seems).

Installation is a little easier on the SpinQ VT as well, since it uses the same installation clips as the standard Intel cooler, and installing the unit takes mere seconds as opposed to anything up to ten minutes on the TRUE Spirit. The TRUE Spirit uses a backplate and that means disassembling the computer and removing the motherboard from the chassis. An unpleasant task but once it's done, it's rather easy to install.

The SpinQ VT, at 495g, is also lighter than the TRUE Spirit. The fan is integrated and does a more-than-adequate job at moving

air even at the lowest speed. The TRUE Spirit, has an interchangeable120mm fan which makes it even quieter than the SpinQ VT. The fan doesn't have direct control but this isn't an issue because on just about any worthwhile motherboard these days you can control the fan speeds either through software or the BIOS

At 670g, the TRUE Spirit is the heavier of the two and this is due to more and larger heatpipes than the SpinQ VT. The base is also thicker. While the difference in temperatures does not seem significant by any margin, it is worth noting that at default CPU frequencies, the TRUE Spirit performs better offering a 7°C lower temperature than the SpinQ VT. However this difference is diminished at the tested 3.6GHz where this difference shrinks to 3°C. Keep in mind that this difference was measured at the highest core temperature and the lowest as well, which is worst case scenario under load and a best case when idle. For both coolers, the room was at 25°C and without a case.

Given the pricing difference between the two, most users who are using an LGA1366 system would be better off with the TRUE Spirit, however if you do regular upgrades and switch platforms often, the SpinQ VT is the cooler for you.

COGAGE is an unknown brand locally and some may be put off by that, but keep in mind that COGAGE is affiliated with Thermalright, which produces the best CPU coolers on the market. If you are still not convinced, the Thermalright Chill Factor heat paste included in the package should be enough to sway you.

#### Specifications

#### Thermaltake SpinQ VT

Platform: LGA1366/1156/775/AM3/

ΔM2+/939/75/<sub>1</sub> Weight: 495g Heat Pipes: 3

Weight: 670g

Heat Pipes: 4

**COGAGE TRUE Spirit** Platform: LGA 1366

#### Temperatures

TRUE Spirit: 33°C BIOS: SpinQ VT: 34°C SpinQ VT: 38°C TRUE Spirit: 37°C Idle: SpinQ VT: 70°C TRUE Spirit: 67°C Load:

Overall, these two coolers are about equal in what they offer; the TRUE Spirit is better at managing temperatures while the SpinQ VT is not only better looking, but more compatible. It does, however, cost about twice as much. With that said we would give the nod to the TRUE Spirit. NAG

Neo Sibeko

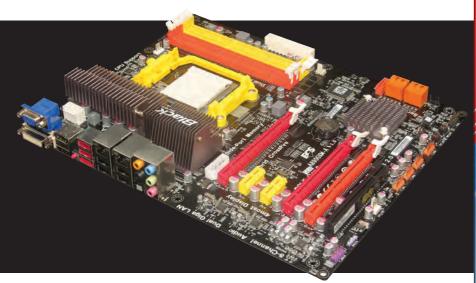
#### THE SCORE

Bottom Line and Score apply to both products

#### >Bottom Line

The Thermaltake and COGAGE CPU coolers go about keeping temperatures down quite differently, but both yield good results.





## ECS A890GXM-A

THE A890GXM-A WAS AMONG the first 890GX based motherboards we received and features 6Gbps SATA but no USB3.0 support. The main ATX 24-pin header is orientated differently so you have to twist your PSU's cable 180 degrees; in essence the cable has to be backwards. The board doesn't have a PS2 port, which can be annoying but is acceptable given that it supports four video output ports for the integrated HD4290 GPU. The peculiar design decisions are also evident in the PCI-Express spacing for the second and third slots which are placed so close to each other it would not be possible to use the 3rd slot if a VGA card were installed in the other. On the subject of PCI-Express slots, the latches that hold the cards in place are located on the inner side of the PCI- $\dot{E}$ xpress slot, which means if you have installed a dual slot graphics card in any slot, it's difficult to remove without risking serious damage to the board, card or the latch itself. The Clear CMOS button on the rear of the motherboard is appreciated, however when it doesn't work you will need to remove the battery which requires you to uninstall the graphics card.

Moving on to the BIOS itself, it's the typical Black Series affair. The MIB advanced control screen has a few features missing such as Turbo mode control for Thuban based CPUs. Also missing is core unlocking or core number configuration. Which means if you have an X2 or X3 CPU, there will be no unlocking of cores for you, as ACC is absent in the BIOS.

While ECS states that its motherboard supports AMD's 6 Core CPUs, the BIOS you will receive does not contain the required code, as the CPU (1090T in this case) is

#### Specifications

Chipset: AMD 890GX+ 850SB Memory banks: 4xDDR3 184-pin

CPU Support: AMD AM3 Phenom II/ Athlon II Slots: 3x PCI-E 16X (8x8x), 2x PCI-E 1X, 1xPCI 2.2

#### Benchmarks

Cinebench 11.5: 4.22

SuperPi 8M: 4min4.047 seconds

Everest Read: 8,941 Everest Write: 6,848 Everest Copy: 10,496 Latency: 51.6

3DMark Vantage CPU: 12,340

read as "Unknown CPU model" and the lack of support prevents you from entering the operating system to update the BIOS. ECS have since released an updated BIOS, which can be downloaded from their website. This brings us to the absence of a BIOS update feature within the BIOS, and the absence of BIOS profiles. So should you configure your system incorrectly, you have to do it all over again disabling devices and such.

CPU-Z readings suggest that the CPU is unable to disengage the core frequency gating and, as such, the main CPU multiplier is always relegated to 7x.

One redeeming aspect of this board is the dual Gigabit LAN support, and for some the native display-port support for the IGP.

Neo Sibeko

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Dual Gigabit LAN
- + 4 display outputs
- + 890GX chipset

#### >Minus

- No Post LED
- Can't disable POST art

#### >Bottom Line

A disappointing Black Series motherboard from ECS, wait for the 890FX board.







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is on the job. NAG

to keep alive and available within seconds

when it kicks down to sleep mode, it

#### **Huntkey 550W Green Power**

UNTKEY IS A SLIGHTLY obscure name perhaps, but it has built up a solid reputation for itself. You always expect a lot less than you get with this brand for the prices they charge for them - and they tend to get shredded in online PSU grouptests for their naming conventions.

They might not compete in sheer visual appeal or outward sexiness like the big names in this segment do, but then you get far more precise output than a no-name unit for only a bit more money. Besides, it isn't like this Green 550W PSU looks like an old silver box. With a nice gloss finish and braided main cable, it at least suggests good things inside.

Forgetting the Green for a moment, forgetting the glossy paintwork, what Huntkey has delivered in this PSU is an extremely reliable 550W for the sort of price you expect to pay for a Seasonic or AOpen mid-range PSU. Although labelled a 550W, the company actually then name this a 450W, 550W being the maximum possible output for the unit. I pitted the Green 550 against my own brand-name 600W PSU, using the identical components, which I know from experience are just on the threshold of that PSU's maximum output.

Although the Green only claims a maximum output of 550W, it manages the load because this company is notorious for building PSUs that push out what they claim, and not 50W below the claimed



THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Produces what it claims
- + Quiet
- + Low cost

#### >Minus

- No cable management
- Just the 12V connector is braided

#### >Bottom Line

You won't get a more reliable PSU delivering this much grunt for this price. And, it's green to boot.

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#### **BIOSTAR** TH55 HD

**THEY SAY THAT WHEN** you eat, you should go for as many different, vivid colours as possible on your plate for the healthiest lifestyle. Perhaps BIOSTAR took inspiration from that for the colour-scheme on this board?

The TH55 HD is quite interesting despite the garish plastics. It's a very affordable way into the latest Intel H55 Express chipset for Core i3, i5, and i7 processors based on an LGA 1156 package. It may only have one PEG slot, but the price also includes the new Intel IGP hence the HD moniker, the signal being carried out via the DVI, HDMI or standard D-Sub connectors on the I/O panel to your display of choice.

So, all we really had to do was pop in our i5 670 test CPU, 4GB of Corsair Dominator GT DDR3 rated at 2,000MHz that we had lying around, and power it all with the Huntkey Green Power 550 W also reviewed in this issue, and install Windows 7 64-bit for some testing.

The Everest memory test showed good performance at stock clocks from this affordable board, 9,492 MB/s reading, 7,527 MB/s writing and 9,188 for the copying portions of the memory test. That's with the CPU running at 3.47 GHz, and the RAM clocked at 1,333 MHz, as per SPD detection (and the theoretical maximum supported frequency of the board).

With 7-phase power and shielded capacitors, the TH55 is also a decent overclocker. Although we did have a non-



stable CPU clock of 4.5 GHz was impressive for such an affordable part.

You can even OC the IGP from the BIOS if you like. Although in and of itself it is a definite improvement over last-generation IGP efforts from Intel, you might need to dial in some extra frequency to really get a good framerate. By default, games like CoD MW2 and even Crysis (although not so much Warhead) run at a playable lick with the prettier effects disabled at 1,280 x 1,024. Try playing in full 1080p though and the chipset gets hot, and performance suffers accordingly.

Overall however, if you must skimp on one component to get higher-evolved models of everything else, going cheap with the BIOSTAR TH55 isn't that bad an idea.

**Russell Bennett** 

Chipset: Intel H55 Express Memory banks: 4 x DDR3 (16GB max) CPU Support: Intel Core 13, 15, i7 (1156) **Slots:** 1 x PEG 16X 2.0.1 x PCI-e 4X. 2 PCI. 7 x USB2.0, 1 x Firewire, 6 x Audio

#### THE SCORE

#### >Plus

- + Nicely ordered BIOS
- + Power/reset buttons on board

#### >MINUS

Slightly limited I/O options

>Bottom Line

A brilliant H55 Express board for the price.





# But is it art?

OST OF US AROUND here have never heard of him, but in America Land, Roger Ebert's The Man when it comes to film criticism. Mostly because he's been doing it pretty much since dinosaurs were tramping around the place, and because he's survived thyroid cancer and Americans are so relentlessly mawkish about that stuff. Anyway, when Ebert recently declared, with all the incontrovertible authority of a cranky cultural fascist who also dauntlessly admits he's never actually played one, that "video games cannot be art", the internet predictably erupted in a tumult of sanctimonious umbrage, sputtering indignation, and wailing nerd rage. How dare this guy say games aren't art?

Perhaps more importantly, though, WHY DOES

ANYONE

**EVEN** 

CARE? I mean, what's art, anyway? A load of outrageously contrived, pretentious, and intellectually dishonest rot for the most part. Oh, anyone can glue a chewed off fingernail and a wasp's tongue to an empty baked bean tin, slop a bucket of bodily discharges and desiccated lizards over it, call it something vapid (but ironically vapid, of course) like "Four Malcontent in Cube", and it's art. So what's the designation "art" actually worth these days? Not very much, apparently.

Besides, what's with this queer perception that something suddenly being "art" somehow legitimises or elevates its status in some esoteric and otherwise unrealisable way? What, is everything

in twine "Art." else just completely meaningless, or simply having no

significance, relevance, or real value? What's wrong with games just being games for, you know, the games' sake, and that being enough? Can I really write an entire paragraph comprising only questions?

Point is, it's a thoroughly tedious and stupid debate. The very definition of "art" is so nebulous and subjective as it is, that trying to shove this, that, or the other thing under it is a waste of everybody's time. One person's post-neo-sub-super-impressionist chef d'oeuvre is another's hamster cage shreddies. It's not like it even actually matters. Does your favourite game being "art" make your experience of that game different in any way? Probably not. NAG

#### **Experience Points**









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# Ready For the Big Time?

GIGABYTE **USB 3.0** Motherboards























